

From the Phenomenon of Wonder to the Praxis of Generosity:
Wonder as a Theological Principle for Theological Anthropology, Liturgy, and Liberation

by

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Para Mami y Papi, con mucho amor

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INTRODUCTION

Some asked for success. I asked for wonder. And You gave it to me.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel¹

Those who wonder discover that this in itself is wonder.

— M. C. Escher²

*There is grandeur in this view of life... from so simple a beginning
endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are
being, evolved.*

—Charles Darwin³

This study emerges from the premise that the experience of wonder is deeply foundational to the human being. Wonder is the *basis* (Latin: “foundation”; Greek: “step” or “pedestal”) on which the human “stands”⁴ epistemically open before all reality. Therefore, if theology is to *transform*, it must engage and speak to the human person at that “basic” level of wonder. Thus, the aim of this treatise is to unearth the deep recesses of wonder that open the human to the world, the self, and God, so that that this portrait of the human can then shape the mode and manner in which theology should speak. In short, *this study is an exploration in theological anthropology*.

All theology is a dialectic between two entities: God and humanity. God is the proper subject of theology, without which the discipline of theology would be superfluous. To do theology is to speak about God and all things *sub ratione Dei*.⁵ Yet, one can speak of God only to the extent in which God reveals Herself to humanity. God is the *subject* of theology, and not

¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *I Asked for Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology*, ed. Samuel H. Dresner (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 12.

² In Robert C. Fuller, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 80.

³ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 400.

⁴ “Basis (n.),” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com/word/basis#etymonline_v_5288, accessed December 29, 2018.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), I.1.7.

object, for the precise reason that theology deals with the God who speaks, acts, and reveals Herself.

This brings up the second entity of theology: humanity. To speak of God (i.e. *theo* [‘God’] + *logos* [‘speech’ or ‘word’]) is, inescapably, to speak to God *as revealed to humans*. Therefore, all theology *implies* a theological anthropology. As Paul Tillich states, “God speaks to the human condition, against it, and for it.”⁶ Karl Rahner’s image of the key and keyhole illustrates this point: to say something about the key implies something about the keyhole.⁷

Theology is self-involving. That is to say, a confessional declaration says something both of the content of the confession and of the confessor. Ingolf Dalferth demonstrates this by pointing to the Gospel narratives of the Petrine confession.⁸ Jesus does not ask Peter, “Who am I?” but rather, “Who *do you say* that I am?” Confessions of faith are self-involving.⁹ To do theology necessarily involves doing theological anthropology. In doing *Christian* theology, this is all the more the case because of the doctrine of the Incarnation.¹⁰ Since theology is self-involving, it requires faith, i.e. *commitment to be self-involved*. Non-confessional explorations (say, sociology of religion) can serve some corrective, tempering or elucidating purposes. Yet theology, as confession, is a discipline of, by, and for the people of faith.

⁶ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Vol II: Existence and the Christ* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 13.

⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 19, 24.

⁸ Matthew 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20.

⁹ Ingolf Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected: Restructuring the Grammar of Christology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 12 ff.; idem., “Introduction,” lecture, Problems in Christology course, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, January 19, 2016.

¹⁰ Walter Kasper praises Karl Rahner on the latter’s way of bringing Christology and anthropology together. Kasper categorizes Rahner’s method as “Christology with an anthropological emphasis.” Rahner’s “Christology from below,” says Kasper, “has opened a new road to Christian belief for a great number of people.” In Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*. New Edition (London: T & T Clark International, 2011), 36 ff.

Wonder, like theology, is self-involving—and viscerally so. Like theology, one can only go so far with a detached exploration. Brain studies might reveal wave patterns in the brain connected to the experience of wonder;¹¹ but these patterns are not the same as the actual *experiencing* of wonder, with all the emotions that accompany it. As interesting as brain scans are, this investigation is not based on them. Rather, it is interested, as its starting point, in the self-involving, experiential aspect of wonder, that is, in the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*) wherein one is “basically” available to wonder. It does not end here at the phenomenal world, but it begins here, and thus includes the self-involving, experiential quality and dimension of wonder.

Why Wonder?

The experience of wonder is a universal human phenomenon. Regardless of geography and history, belief and worldview, the experience of wonder has been described and portrayed in poetry and prose, in music and the arts. From the ancients to today, the senses of wonder and awe have marked human experience and expression. Philosophies, both of East and West, have noted the centrality, primacy, or at least uniqueness of wonder among the passions.¹² Wonder has played a crucial, defining role in conversations about beauty, aesthetics, and the arts, and many times is credited as the source of inspiration or creativity. (The writings of some of these thinkers will be discussed, mentioned, or used in chapter 1.)

The progress of science came with the fear that increasing scientific knowledge would rob humanity of its sense of wonder. But in fact, the opposite has occurred. Scientists have

¹¹ Cf. Andreas Weber, *The Biology of Wonder: Aliveness, Feeling, and the Metamorphosis of Science* (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society, 2016), 111 ff.; Fuller, *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality*.

¹² For example, see: René Descartes, “On the Passions of the Soul,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 358, 362 ff.; Michelle Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine: Hindu and Christian Theologies of Emotion*, Comparative Theology: Thinking Across Traditions (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 181 ff.

acknowledged the role of wonder's presence in initial questioning, the process of experimentation, and the new discoveries after experimentation. The greatest astrophysicist of the present generation, the incomparable Stephen Hawking, admitted that at times a hypothesis is proposed for "aesthetic" reasons alone.¹³ What Socrates said of philosophy can be said of science as well: it begins with wonder.¹⁴ About the *process* of experimentation, Hawking states that it is "not only a discipline of reason but, also, one of romance and passion,"¹⁵ intimating wonder as an impetus in science. At the end of scientific research, one is again confronted by wonder. Charles Darwin himself was in awe of the evolved and evolving world his theory revealed. The last sentence of his monumental *The Origin of Species* is simply beautiful, "There is grandeur in this view of life... from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved."¹⁶ Scientific knowledge has not stifled wonder; it has stimulated it. Explaining need not lead to explaining away, as "explanatory reductionism" unfortunately assumes.¹⁷

The scope of this study is not the totality of the wondrous in all its idiosyncrasies, manifestations, and expressions. Rather, its end is theological. It examines the phenomenon of wonder as an organizing and elucidating principle for theological anthropology. Without fully developing it, it works towards a theological anthropology of wonder informed *by* wonder, with the goal that this developing theological anthropology can consequently inform the doing of theology. Hence, I first bracket the *experience* of wonder in order to get "to the thing itself," i.e.

¹³ Stephen W. Hawking, *The Theory of Everything: The Origin and Fate of the Universe*, New Edition (Beverly Hills, CA: Phoenix Books, 2007), 92.

¹⁴ Plato, "Theatetus," line 155d, in Plato, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series, 71 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982) 860.

¹⁵ In Fanuel Muindi and Jessica W. Tsai, *Journeys in Science: Inspiring the Next Generation* (London: Academic Press, 2017), vii.

¹⁶ Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, 400.

¹⁷ Philip Clayton, *Religion and Science: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 34–39.

the *eidos* of wonder. Then I explore being as such, i.e. metaphysical reality, to find an ontological ground or basis for wonder. Next, I work toward a theological anthropology of wonder, informed by the human experience of wonder and the metaphysical vision of wonder. Lastly, I investigate the *lived* theological anthropology of wonder as expressed and experienced in liturgy and liberation.

Problems

There are certain problems which this study on wonder seeks to confront. One such problem has to do with what I call the deforming and “flattening” of human life in our contemporary, neoliberal capitalist age. The second deals with how this flattened, deforming anthropology has negatively affected the expression and discourse of faith (i.e. theology). Let us look at each in turn.

The first is the modern predicament of life distorted by the negative impacts of an increasingly globalizing and market-driven *areligion* with its *atheology*, which values human life solely for its utility and productivity. This globalizing “ritual” of the unholy Market¹⁸ has had disastrous effects on creational flourishing, for this idol “enframes”¹⁹ creation, “ordering” and “revealing” it as mere “raw material” for its production and profitability.

This “ritual” of production and profit of the “cult” of the global market is an enacting form of an underlying *atheology*. It is its “idoliturgy.” This idol-speak places *value* and *worth* in (i.e. deems “good”) that which can produce for the insatiable market system. This includes human subjects: migrant farm workers, sweatshop laborers, girls sold into sex trafficking, and

¹⁸ Juan José Tamayo Acosta, *Otra teología es posible: Pluralismo religioso, interculturalidad y feminismo*, Biblioteca Herder (Barcelona: Herder, 2012); idem., *Invitación a la utopía: Estudio histórico para tiempos de crisis* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 2013).

¹⁹ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 19–20.

coltan miners in the Congolese forest. From this perspective, humans are humans-*that*-produce, not even humans-*who*-produce. Human *being* is objectified and reduced to a human *doing*. The human subject is now a human *object*. The human is a mode of production and eventually an object of exploitation.

The outcome of all this is a flattening of the human, a reduced and distorted anthropology (a misanthropy), and its residue is a reduced and distorted perception of all that is—a perception “enframed” by a *telos* of production. Aesthetics becomes economics.²⁰ As a result, wonder is neglected and deemed useless and impractical, unable to produce or be profitable. At best, it is a nice escape from the hustle-and-bustle of this life of production: a retreat to a pleasant getaway before heading back to the office cubicle-turned-cage. Yet, as the rhetoric goes, one cannot—must not—remain in wonder, according to the globalizing *raison d’être*. For that which is constitutive of the human becomes inconsequential, and what is at essential to human perception of and posture toward the world becomes problematic.

Karl Marx gave this phenomenon a term: alienation [*Entäusserung*]. The human is alienated in three ways: from her labor (both the action of producing and the end product) which is extracted from her for the market; displaced from her community to be placed instead in competition; and from her *being*, made instead in “commodity” in a “world of things.”²¹ For Marx, this “alienation-as-commodified-self” was no speculative theory but “a present-day

²⁰ Cf. Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Las Ideas Estéticas De Marx*, Biblioteca Del Pensamiento Socialista (México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2005), 153 ff.

²¹ Karl Marx, “Estranged Labor (1844),” in Karl Marx and John C. Raines, *Marx on Religion*. ed. John C. Raines (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2002), 118–19. Cf. Jonathan Wolff, “Karl Marx,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/marx/>, accessed October 17, 2018; István Mészáros, *Marx’s Theory of Alienation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx’s Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, Cambridge Studies in the History and Theory of Politics (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

economic fact.”²² The laborer producing the commodity is, herself, also “commodified.” Marx writes that to be commodified is to become “alien” to oneself, since the “the object that labor produces” becomes “a power independent of the producer.” It becomes “something alien.”²³ Since “labor not only produces commodities” but also produces “workers as a commodity,”²⁴ that commodified worker is alien to what it means to be authentically human. “In the sphere of political economy this realization of labor appears as a loss of reality for the worker.”²⁵ The human as a result becomes “a stranger in the world that he himself has made.”²⁶

Affected by this commodification, this alienated self cannot make sense of the *sensus* or *affectus* of wonder. As the phenomenological account of wonder will demonstrate (chapter one), the human cannot “grasp” wonder. Instead, wonder “grasps” the human. Since it cannot be grasped, it can neither be manipulated, nor commodified. That is to say, there is something about being human that cannot be grasped, contained, reduced, or flattened—what the theological anthropological study in chapter three will term “transcendence.” Therefore, any attempts to reduce or “flatten” the human in fact dehumanize her. A presupposition of this dissertation is that a reclaiming of wonder has the potential to return humanity to itself, to make the woefully estranged, wonderfully marvelous again. This anthropological crisis is the first problem that the investigation seeks to address.

A second problem that I address is the theological anthropological crisis that is in part a result of the present-day flattening of the human being. As one may suspect, religious life is not immune to the anthropological reduction and epistemological deterioration that results from the

²² Marx, “Estranged Labor (1844),” 119.

²³ Marx, “Estranged Labor (1844),” 119.

²⁴ Marx, “Estranged Labor (1844),” 119.

²⁵ Marx, “Estranged Labor (1844),” 119.

²⁶ Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, trans. Frederick Neuhouser and Alan E. Smith, New Directions in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 3.

alienation and commodification of the human being. When the addressee of revelation, the human being, becomes a human *commodity*, the *address* of faith (i.e. theological content) is also commodified, made into something to consume—into something the “itching,” consumeristic ears want to hear.²⁷ The prophetic content of faith is morphed into a profitable sales pitch. The ritual of mystery before the God of creation is reduced to an “investment of time” that “meets my needs.” The witness of the faithful in the world is reduced to “private matters of the hearts” so as to not disrupt “private interests” of the god of the Market. People of faith have fallen under the “spell” (alluding to Engels and Marx here) of this “sorcerous” god of the market.²⁸

This commodified and commodifying world has found its way into the North American religious landscape in two ways, the first more subtle than the second. One is the shift from faith as public to faith as *entirely* private. To be sure, Christian faith has always had an interior life of sorts, one that calls one to devotion and piety. Yet the modern Lockean shift²⁹ has been to relegate religion entirely to the private sphere. To be sure, some of this tempering of religion’s political powers was necessary in response to abuses of ecclesiastical power, particularly on the heels of years of religious violence. Locke was right in positing that faith adopted by force is no faith at all,³⁰ a wise socio-religious word affirmed in the Qur’ān in an earlier millennium.³¹

²⁷ Cf. 2 Timothy 4:3.

²⁸ “Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.” K. Marx and F. Engel “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” in *Marx/Engels Selected Works*, vol. 1, ed. Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CP of the USSR (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), 17.

²⁹ James Tully, “Locke, John (1632–1704),” in *Encyclopedia of Ethics*. 2nd ed., ed. Lawrence C. Becker and Charlotte B Becker (New York: Routledge, 2001), https://search-credoreference-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/content/entry/routethics/locke_john_1632_1704/0, accessed December 15, 2018; Alex Tuckness, “Locke’s Political Philosophy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/locke-political/>, accessed December 31, 2018; cf. John Locke and Robert Filmer, *Two Treatises of Government: With a Supplement, Patriarcha*, by Robert Filmer, ed. Thomas I. Cook, The Hafner Library of Classics, No. 2 (New York: Hafner Pub, 1947).

³⁰ Tuckness, “Locke’s Political Philosophy,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online).

³¹ *Al-Baqara* 2.256: “There is no compulsion in religion.”

Nevertheless, faith can never be an entirely private affair. Faith is a communal endeavor, and one that is undertaken in this world. Although not *of* the world, the community of faith is inescapably *in* the world.³² One's life is both public and private, and faith shapes both. The decision is not between private and public, but rather between ways and modes of expressing faith privately and publicly, the latter taking into consideration the pluralistic landscape.

Faith has become commodified in the North American landscape in another more overt way. The language used to describe religious belonging and faith commitment is typically that of commerce and consumption. At least in Protestant circles, it is common to hear people say things like: *I am currently 'shopping' for a church*; or, *I need to church that meets my needs*. The collection of the offering is “payment,” which is based on the pastor's “performance” that Sunday and her “productivity” during the week.

The most idolatrous instantiation of this consumeristic brand of Christianity is found in the “prosperity gospel” movement, which accepts the capitalistic values of wealth and success as the metrics for faithfulness. “Blessings” are understood as an abundance of money, nice cars, and private jets. This prosperity gospel preaching dominates the world of televangelism: pseudo-preachers proclaiming a supposed gospel message distorted into a get-rich-quick theme that takes the hard-earned savings of the vulnerable to make themselves rich, while those who fund their luxurious ministries are barely scraping by.³³ These charlatans are a Feuerbachian “projection”³⁴ of a capitalist ideology that alienates humans, reducing them to commodities and consumers.

³² Cf. John 14:14–17.

³³ For example of this “Christianized” charlatanry, see: Abby Ohlheiser, “Pastor Creflo Dollar might get his \$65 million private jet after all,” *Washington Post* (June 3, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2015/06/03/pastor-creflo-dollar-might-get-his-65-million-private-jet-after-all/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.bad47a8dace0, accessed December 31, 2018.

³⁴ L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Elliot, Great Books in Philosophy (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1989), 33.

Yet, despite the present predicament which reduces humanity and humanity's God-talk, this study affirms that faith is the corrective—faith in the God of creation, redemption, and consummation. Genuine faith can resist and transform both the human and how the human “sees” and lives in/with the world. Wonder, *because it precedes and exceeds*, shifts the conversation from consuming divine reward to sharing, in total dependence to God and interdependence of all that is, of the generosity of being. As I argue below, this being-as-generosity is both a gift and a challenge.

Introducing Theo-Thaumatics

The most frequent term used in the Christian New Testament is θαυμά (thauma; lit. “wonder,” “amazement”) and θαυμάζω (thaumazō; lit. “to wonder,” “to marvel,” “to be astonished,” or even “to admire”).³⁵ This project offers *thaumatic* resources for deepening theological anthropology. As such, it is not seeking to construct a full portrait of the human being in theological terms. (That task is too ambitious for the present work.) Rather, these are thaumatic sketches, lines, and contours that can give a greater definition to the human person as created by God.

This is a work in what I am calling “theo-thaumatics,” or more specifically, theo-thaumatic anthropology. It seeks to work within, and not supplant, Christian confession to demonstrate the transforming potential of theology when the availability to wonder shapes the way we speak of God and the world as the recipient of God's generous presence. Wonder, as an organizing and interpretive principle, can reveal previously hidden or forgotten treasures of the

³⁵ William F. Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: A Translation and Adaptation of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der Übrigen Urchristlichen Literatur*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 276.

Christian faith (and maybe of the other Abrahamic faiths as well) that can stand against the economic ritual and cult of the globalizing unholy Market.

This mode of theo-thaumatic impetus is cultivated in the Church's liturgy and lived out in the world through the Church's struggle for liberation, a struggle shared with its Abrahamic kin. Thus, properly understood, wonder does not draw the faithful away from the world in order to encounter God, like some sort of romantic retreat away from every struggle. Rather, it situates them in a deeper mode of being-in-the-world that gets to the root of existence, which I argue is generosity. At their best, the Church's liturgical life and liberating presence in the world speak directly to this basic level of the human of wonder because it forms humans to be generous presences in the world. Liturgy and works of justice are theo-thaumatic modes of living in God's presence, which "orients"³⁶ one to God by attuning one to the generosity that ground existence generally and the experience of wonder specifically. Wonder reveals a world "penetrated by the generous sap of God."³⁷

Methods and Structure

To construct my overall argument that begins with the experience of wonder and ends with the Church's liturgical life and liberative witness, this treatise deploys several methods of inquiry in a cumulative, argumentative sequence, from a phenomenological account of wonder, to a metaphysical investigation into a world where wonder is possible, to a theo-thaumatic account of the human person, and finally to an inquiry into liturgy and liberation in light of this theo-thaumatic portrait of the human.

³⁶ I. Dalferth, *Theology and Philosophy*, Signposts in Theology (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 159.

³⁷ Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life: Life of the Sacraments*, Story Theology (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987), 4.

The methods employed were intentionally selected in accordance with each chapter's subject. The first essay is an investigation into the *experience* of wonder. As Paul C. Taylor rightly points out, phenomenology is the philosophy of conscious experience that gives primacy to immediacy, environment, and embodiment,³⁸ three primordial aspects of wonder as well. Phenomenology is a descriptively incisive method, making it ideal for honing in on wonder as experienced.

The next chapter is an essay on the metaphysics of being. This move is necessary since the attempt is to ground the thoroughly subjective experience of wonder in some objective reality. This metaphysical turn takes the investigation to what "stands behind" (*sub-stance*) wonder. Thus, even though I accept the *fruits* of the phenomenological reduction, I do not accept the metaphysical *limits* set by phenomenological reduction as such. This metaphysical approach sees the phenomenological features revealed in the previous chapter as "cyphers of transcendence."³⁹ Metaphysical inquiry allows one to go where phenomenology cannot, namely *behind* the phenomenon of wonder.

This metaphysical chapter is a comparative exercise that moves beyond the Christian orbit and into Islamic and Jewish metaphysics as well. It is consequently a history of philosophical and theological thought that explores the respective doctrines of participation of three prominent metaphysicians of the medieval period, Shlomo Ben Yehuda Ibn Gabirol, Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī, and Thomas Aquinas. (Below I give reasons for choosing these three philosophers.)

³⁸ Paul C. Taylor, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2014), 147–48.

³⁹ Patrick Masterson, *Sense of Creation: Experience and the God Beyond*, Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Series (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), i, 2.

The following excursus and remaining two chapters are exercises in constructive theology. The comparative analysis in chapter 2 reveals a major similarity between the three metaphysical schemata being reviewed, namely, that *divine generosity ultimately grounds wonder*. Generosity, in that it is “excessive,” grounds the experience of wonder, which is nothing less than the experience of an “excess-with” the created order. The excursus offers a brief theological definition of “generosity.”

I then work toward a theological anthropology of wonder (or a theo-thaumatic anthropology). It is not a full construction, only sketches toward such a theo-thaumatic construction of the human. Then, based on this theological anthropology, I draw out some implications for liturgy and liberation as lived theology by placing these within Christian praxis as the praxis of generosity.

Brief Apologia: Why Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas?

The comparative chapter focuses on Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas. There are many scholars of the Golden Age/Medieval Period whose work one could engage to discuss the theme of wonder. So why specifically Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas? For two historical reasons and two philosophical/theological ones. The first historical reason is simply that their impact on their respective religions and on philosophy and theology is monumental. Aquinas is considered *Doctor Angelicus*, the highest of honorific titles in the Catholic Church. Even non-Catholic scholarship is indebted to him, whether they engage him as friend or foe. Hence, all of Western theology either bears his mark or must engage with his ideas.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s architectonic vision of the universe, like Aquinas’, has generated a long list of admirers and enemies.⁴⁰ Chittick and others consider him to have been “the greatest Muslim philosopher.”⁴¹ Although he had some major detractors, like Ibn Taymiyyah,⁴² much of mainstream Islam still embraced him (knowingly or unknowingly), unlike Ibn Rushd whose influence was much more noticeable in Christian scholasticism.⁴³ Part of his genius was the synthesizing of *fiqh*, *kalām*, *falsafa*, and *taṣawwuf*. Prior to Ghazālī and Ibn ‘Arabī, the disciplines (*fiqh*, *kalām*, *falsafa*, *taṣawwuf*) were distinct, though some scholars were masters in two or more disciplines (like Ghazālī). “Cross-fertilization” of these disciplines increased gradually, but Ibn ‘Arabī “brought them together in one grand synthesis.”⁴⁴

Ibn Gabirol’s impact was equally impressive, but it requires some explaining, since his legacy in reception history is much more complicated.⁴⁵ *Fons Vitae* is “one of the most original works of medieval Neoplatonism.”⁴⁶ Yet because of the lack of biblical and rabbinic citations, it was believed to have been penned by a Christian (or Muslim), an accepted assertion until Solomon Munk “discovered” its Jewish author and deemed it “Jewish philosophy.”⁴⁷ Until Munk’s discovery, Ibn Gabirol had “two lives.” There was the prolific (and thoroughly Jewish) poet whose metric pronouncements are still chanted during Jewish holy days (including Yom Kippur, the highest of holy days). Then there was the (Neoplatonic Augustinian) writer of *Fons*

⁴⁰ See Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, Suny Series in Islam (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 49–112; William C. Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, Makers of the Muslim World. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 2 ff.

⁴¹ Chittick, “Ibn Arabi,” In *the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (online).

⁴² See Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, 87–112.

⁴³ Cf. Nsar, *Three Muslim Sages*, 93.

⁴⁴ William C. Chittick, “Worship,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 229.

⁴⁵ Cf. Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 89.

⁴⁶ Aaron Hughes, *Rethinking Jewish Philosophy: Beyond Particularism and Universalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62.

⁴⁷ Hughes, *Rethinking Jewish Philosophy*, 62.

Vitae. The latter made a larger impact beyond Judaism, while the former echoed mainly within the walls of the synagogue. For centuries, the Christian world believed that *Fons Vitae* was written by an Augustinian Christian,⁴⁸ largely due to the fact that its Latin translator Dominicus Gundissalinus incorporated some Christian superimpositions and a Christocentric benediction at the end of his Latin rendition.⁴⁹

It has been difficult to ascertain its original writer since *Fons Vitae* cites no religious texts, except in its title,⁵⁰ and no texts from rabbinics or *halakha*, *kalām*, or jurisprudence, nor from the New Testament or patristics. Munk reunited these “two lives” of Ibn Gabirol, establishing the fact that the pious, poetic images of “The Kingly Crown” and the Neoplatonist metaphysical vision in *Fons Vitae* were penned by the same quill.

But did *Fons Vitae* impact Jewish thought? Even though the tome was for centuries believed to be of Christian/Augustinian origins, it seems that Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysical masterpiece did have an indirect impact on Jewish faith and life in that its ontological vision is operative in his poetry, most noticeably in “*Keter Malkhūt* (The Kingly Crown),” which is a re-articulation of Gabirolian metaphysics put to rhyme and substantiated by scriptural and rabbinic material.⁵¹ This most famous of his poems is sung during Yom Kippur, the highest of holy days of the Jewish people. So logically it seems that *Fons Vitae* contributed to Jewish practice and faith via “The Royal Crown,” since the latter upholds and promotes the same metaphysical blueprint of life as the former and does so in the compelling poetry of faith.⁵²

⁴⁸ Others thought that it was penned by a Muslim Neoplatonist. See Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 90.

⁴⁹ For commentary on Dominicus Gundissalinus’ corpus as translator, see Manuel Alonso Alonso, “Notas sobre los traductores toledanos Domingo Gundisalvo y Juan Hispano,” *al-Andalus* 8 (1943): 155–188.

⁵⁰ The title is from Psalm 36:9: “For with you is *the fountain of life*; in your light we see light” (NRSV).

⁵¹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 42.

⁵² Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 42; cf. T. M. Rudavsky, “Medieval Jewish Neoplatonism,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, Routledge History of World Philosophies, Vol. II. (London, Routledge, 2003), 156–58.

In addition to historical influence, a second historical reason for choosing these three thinkers has to do with chronology and geography. Together, their lives and work span approximately two hundred years, from the mid-eleventh to the mid-thirteenth centuries. Historiographically speaking, this tight historical window facilitates the historical theological task of recreating the philosophical scene of the period in which these three masters moved.

The geography likewise assists the historical task. The Andalusian peninsula was a hotbed of philosophical and theological discourse, exchange, and transmission. Moreover, the translation enterprise there equipped all three Abrahamic faiths with both old and new texts in metaphysics and *kalām*/theology. The density of scholarship and translation concentrated in Andalusia should be neither overlooked nor underestimated. Again geographically speaking, the role that the Andalusian intellectual milieu played is obvious in the case of Ibn Gabirol and Ibn ʿArabī, since both were Andalusian by birth and spent substantial time there, writing and formulating their perspectives. Ibn Gabirol was supported by Jewish aristocracy until he fell into disfavor for his “arrogance” and “temper.”⁵³ Likewise supported by wealthy families, Ibn ʿArabī had access to the work of his preceding co-religionists. His autobiography recounts that he met Ibn Rushd when the latter was nearing his death.⁵⁴ For all these reasons, their connection in Andalusian scholarship seems unquestionable.

Less obvious though still very real are the ways in which Andalusian scholarship and translation so thoroughly informed Aquinas. From this hub of scholastic activity, Aquinas was working with material that came to him already translated into Latin. Two of his main

⁵³ Tamar Rudavsky, “Avencebrol,” in *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jorge J. E. Gracia and Timothy N. Noone (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), 174.

⁵⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*. Harvard Studies in World Religion (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 92–93; William Chittick, “Ibn Arabi,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/ibn-arabi/>, accessed June 23, 2018.

interlocutors were Andalusian: Ibn Rushd, for whom he reserved the honorific title, “The Commentator,” and Maimonides (whom Aquinas honored with the title “Rabbi”). Aquinas was a *comparative* theologian.

Moreover, since he did not read Arabic (though several other Dominicans did),⁵⁵ he depended on the Iberian translation centers like Toledo and Cordova, which translated from Arabic to Latin.⁵⁶ (However, for Aristotle, Aquinas did work from William of Moerbeke’s translations directly from the Greek.⁵⁷) Despite the interpretative inevitability of the act of translation,⁵⁸ the intellectual impact of Andalusia on Aquinas’ thought must have been significant.

Another theological tie to Andalusia is Aquinas’ affiliation to the Dominicans, whose founder, Dominic de Guzmán, was from Caleruega in Christian-controlled northern Spain. From the outset, the Dominicans were a missionary order, initially focused on bringing back into the fold the Carthars who had succumbed to gnostic heresy.⁵⁹ They soon shifted their evangelistic focus toward the Jews and Muslims.⁶⁰ Although his Dominican brothers believed that reason alone could lead to conversion and conversely Aquinas posited that such transformation required faith assisted by reason,⁶¹ he did nonetheless adopt much of their polemical and apologetic

⁵⁵ John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 234 ff.

⁵⁶ Alonso Alonso, “Notas sobre los traductores toledanos,” 155–88.

⁵⁷ Jean Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 161 ff.

⁵⁸ Sarah Pessin notes the ways that normative translations of key philosophical terms a) had a Christian bent when translated in Latin; and b) led to erroneous reception of Ibn Gabirol by the Christian scholastics. In Sarah Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire: Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1 ff., 59 ff. Toshihiko Izutsu demonstrates how Avicennian scholarship by Christians suffered from misunderstandings, due in large part to matters of translation. In *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), 4 ff.

⁵⁹ John Victor Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 233 ff.

⁶⁰ Tolan, *Saracens*, 233 ff.

⁶¹ Tolan, *Saracens*, 233, 242.

approaches, which were developed in large part with the Jewish and Muslim Andalusian populaces in mind. Aquinas and the Catalanian Ramon Martí were both students of Albert Magnus. Later, when writing his *Summa contra gentiles*, Aquinas incorporated much of Martí's arguments in *Capistrum Iudaeorum*, who in turn borrowed from *Summa contra gentiles* to compose his influential *Pugio fidei*.⁶² Indeed, documentary evidence shows that Martí relayed Ramon de Penyafort's⁶³ request for Aquinas to write his *Summa contra gentiles*. Hence, although he never lived there, Aquinas can be said to be "Andalusian" in a sense because of all the ways in which the Peninsular Muslim, Jewish, and Christian philosophical-theological milieu informed his thought. Yet this is not to underestimate other sources and influences in Aquinas' thought, like Italian monasticism and Parisian scholasticism.

In addition to their respective places in the history of thought, there are philosophical and theological reasons for a comparative engagement of Ibn Gabirol, Ibn 'Arabī, and Aquinas. First, all three were metaphysicians of being. Thus, the comparative task can be achieved on common ontological grounds. This cannot be said of other thinkers, like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Judah ben Shmuel Halevi, who did not focus on ontological "speculation" and indeed even actively discouraged it.⁶⁴

⁶² Tolan, *Saracens*, 233, 242.

⁶³ Ramon de Penyafort was a Dominican apologist from Catalonia.

⁶⁴ Ghazālī has been read as being against philosophy or at least some forms of "speculative" philosophy. Cf. Eric L. Ormsby, *Ghazali: The Revival of Islam*, Makers of the Muslim World (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 47. In his telling of his own "conversion" to Sufism, Ghazālī warns against the "evil and mischief of philosophy" because the discipline "cleaves the stigma of unbelief and godlessness." In *Al-Ghazālī's Path to Sufism, His Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal*, trans. R.J. McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2006), 42, 28. Yet, Frank Griffel begs to differ on the traditional reading of Ghazālī as anti-philosopher. He claims instead that Ghazālī's criticism was directed at certain teachings of Muslim Peripatetics and not at *falsafa* as a whole. See his "Al-Ghazālī on the Role of *falsafa* in Islam," in *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 97–110.

Halevi wrote his classic *The Kuzari* with a goal of freeing the pure Jewish faith from the "heretical" machinations of Ibn Gabirol, Bahya ben Joseph Ibn Paquda, and the like. See Halevi's *The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel*, trans. Hartwig Hirschfeld (New York: Schocken Books, 1964). Halevi had staunchly nationalistic views, which led him to make his way to Israel. Interestingly, although he despised Islam, he admired

A second philosophical reason is that within their metaphysics of being, each thinker deploys the Platonic doctrine of participation when relating creation to Creator (Aquinas), the diverse materiality to the One Source (Ibn Gabirol), the “known” to the “Knower” (Ibn ‘Arabī). In the work of all three philosophers, the doctrine of participation mediates and reconciles the major dialectic of classical monotheism: how the many, composite created beings come from a simple One; or in theological terms, how creation relates to a God who is wholly transcendent. Although Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas drew upon this doctrine of participation in different ways, generally speaking they all used it for the *same* reason.

By paying particular attention to participation, the metaphysical inquiry focused on one key feature of their respective metaphysics—a useful strategy since each thinker’s output was prodigious. The goal of this chapter is thus a comparative exploration of their doctrines of participation only, not of the overall schemata of all three thinkers. It includes other ontological issues only when they contribute significantly to the study of participation.

Chapters Summaries

Chapter one uses the phenomenological *epoché* to provide a philosophical account of wonder. In that chapter, I conclude that wonder signifies or points to an “excess-within” things themselves and indeed within the horizon of experience itself. Against Marion, it is not that moments of wonder exceed the horizon of experience, as he claims with his notion of “saturated phenomena,” but that the horizon itself is marked by an excess. Yet, I further argue, this excessive horizon is never normalized since emotive responses like curiosity, awe, surprise, or

and was informed by Sufism generally and Ghazālī specifically. In Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi’s Kuzari*, Suny Series in Jewish Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 89–102.

negatively, dread typically accompany the experience of wonder. Wonder demonstrates that the excess-within of the lifeworld never becomes “the new normal,” but rather remains ever new.

Within this excessive horizon, wonder is defined as *a particularly intense and enduring event between the exceeding sensation-hýle of the object eliciting wonder acting upon the pre-intentional, affectively-driven subject*. Phrased differently, wonder is the event between the “excess-within” of the other and the basic (as in “base”) openness of the subject which is “available” to the that “excessive” quality in the lifeworld.

The inversion of activity and passivity is crucial for understanding wonder. As experienced, wonder is not something that humans can grasp; rather, wonder grasps the human. It grasps the human because of the human’s epistemic posture toward the world. The potential for wonder is already “at hand”; therefore, wonder precedes the question. Lastly, in cases of awe, it exceeds the answer. The end of the phenomenological reduction in this first chapter leaves one general question unresolved.

The inquiry leaves unanswered the intimation of an “ontological tension” in the event of wonder between identity and otherness, between the subject being “grasped” by wonder and the object, event, or field (in short, “other”) doing the “grasping.” Yet, this issue is beyond the phenomenological scope, which leads to the methodological change in following chapter. This move is methodologically significant. One could argue that these questions can be handled via an ontological phenomenology (maybe of the Sartrean or Heideggerian sort), but I opt for the “openness” that a metaphysical analysis offers to get at existence as such, instead of subjective existence.

Thus, in the second chapter, I approach wonder metaphysically to get a substantial look at what may “stand behind” wonder. I limit the metaphysical investigation to the doctrine of

participation, which I propose makes sense of, and grounds, the “ontological tension” of identity and difference present in the event of wonder. In brief, I define the doctrine of participation as the metaphysical notion that lower levels of being depend and “participate,” *in a constitutive way*, on higher levels or principles.⁶⁵ This chapter is a close study of the respective doctrines of participation of Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas. Each thinker proposes a “higher principle” in which all things “participate.” For Ibn Gabirol, all of creation participates in a “Grounding Element” (*yesōd*) just “outside” of God that is the substratum of all existence (except God of course). For Ibn ‘Arabī, creation participates in the *wujūd* (“being/finding”), in which presence and knowledge coincide, coinciding completely in God. And for Aquinas, all reality (besides God who is subsisting Being itself) participates in this Being for its existence. After delineating each in turn, I conclude with a comparative analysis. I decide on participation in *being* (Aquinas’ *esse* and Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wujūd*) as the most faithful metaphysical vision of reality and of the experience of wonder therein.

Despite their major differences, a crucial similarity between Ibn Gabirol’s, Ibn ‘Arabī’s, and Aquinas’ doctrines of participation emerges: All three affirm that *generosity* ultimately grounds existence. Generosity is a constitutive element or quality of *yesōd* (Ibn Gabirol), *wujūd* (Ibn ‘Arabī), and *esse* (Aquinas). What grounds the “excess-with” of the lifeworld, which is experienced in the event of wonder, is a transcendental Excess. That transcendental Excess *is* divine generosity since generosity is essentially “excessive.” In other words, a theology of wonder is a theology of generosity. Thaumatic theology is *charismatic* theology (from the Greek χάρισμα, *charisma*, “favor” or “divine gift”).

⁶⁵ Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

Defining generosity-as-excess is the subject of the excursus that follows chapter two. It is treated as an excursus because it is a central piece to wonder, but I do not to lose sight of wonder. The purpose in this short reflection is to offer the general contours of generosity, both divine and human. In short, generosity is *essentially* excessive. Generosity is the impulse to give freely without needing to *and* to give more than is needed. Moreover, generosity is dynamic; that is, an ongoing giving-and-receiving movement is essential to generosity. To be fully human is to accept the gift and challenge of this dynamic giving-ness. To live life fully is to be open to receiving and sharing this generosity. Wonder reveals to the human this dynamic generosity as the basis of both subjective experience and objective reality.

Following the excursus on generosity, chapter three takes the initial steps toward a constructive theological anthropology. Here, I paint a theological portrait of the human based on wonder (excess-within) and the metaphysics of generosity (transcendental Excess). I begin with philosophical and theological accounts of human openness, which propose that what marks humans is their being “open *to* the world,” meaning that humans reach out toward the world and “open” it epistemologically. While accepting this to be true, I assert that this does not sufficiently account for wonder, since it is wonder, and not the human, that does the grasping and that opens the human. Therefore, I submit that in the grasp of wonder, the human’s epistemic availability to the O/other is “opened *by* the world.” Thus, the capacity for and availability to wonder is a reaching out that occurs at the core of human being, which is in response to a prior being grasped by the O/other. This reaching out is infinite, because the human is capable of being grasped by the Infinite. Such an understanding of wonder makes wonder indispensable for the human act of faith in God specifically. I conclude by bringing together wonder and faith in such a way that one is constitutive of the other.

In the final chapter, I draw out the implicit theo-thaumatic anthropology at play in Christian praxis as the praxis of generosity and in both liturgy and liberation as sacramental practices within this larger “praxis of generosity.” That is to say, liturgy and liberation are sacramental praxes of generosity, which make one increasingly available to wonder. They are practices that acclimate one to the generosity that grounds creation and that habituate one’s live toward generosity. Running throughout the chapter is the ontological connection between wonder and generosity.

Chapter 4 begins with generosity and ends with wonder, inverting the movement of Chapter 3 that begins with wonder and ends with generosity. Wonder is part of liturgy and liberation only to the extent that they are praxes of generosity. Wonder is beyond human control. Yet, by habituating one’s life to generosity through the practices of liturgy, and liberation, one becomes more available and attuned to the experience of wonder. The aim of liturgy and liberation is not experiencing wonder, but rather extending generosity as both a gift to receive and a demand to live out. For it is through living generously that one can become supremely open to the joy of wonder and awe. As sacramental praxes of generosity, liturgy and liberation are “rooting” exercises, “re-grounding” humanity in Generosity Itself as counter praxes to sin that “uproots” its from that excessive grounding of life. Phrased differently, liturgy and liberation, ontologically speaking, tap into the deep basis of existence, which is Generosity Itself. They are thaumatic in so far as they are charismatic (as in *charis*, ‘gift’).

Christian praxis is the praxis of generosity, whose “attitude” is love for the world that God loves. The essay concluded with an ode to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoration, liberation and joy. By the power of the Holy Spirit, liturgy opens one to God in Christ so that one

may be opened by the world in its struggle for justice. This opening of the Spirit—to God in Christ and to the world in Christ's name—is pure joy.

CHAPTER 1—A PHENOMENOLOGY OF WONDER

Perhaps the best formulation of the reduction is... a 'wonder' before the world... [I]t steps back in order to see transcendences spring forth and it loosens the intentional threads that connect us to the world in order to make them appear; it alone is conscious of the world because it reveals the world as strange and paradoxical.

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty¹

To be surprised, to wonder, is to begin to understand.

—José Ortega y Gasset²

The aim of this chapter is to describe wonder using the phenomenological *epoché*.³ Thus, it will be grounded in experience generally, and sensuous experience specifically, since experience tells us that wonder arises from our sensuous (as in “sense”) contact with and in the lifeworld. If Eugen Fink (Husserl’s assistant) is right in defining the reductive act as “wonder,”⁴ then a wondering about wonder is inevitably a complicated task, requiring that we “limp”⁵ slowly toward an eidetic reduction of wonder.⁶

This chapter is composed of a series of “local” reductions, which will get ultimately at the *eidōs* of wonder. First, I highlight my reasons for using phenomenology for investigating the experience wonder. Next, we deconstruct the subject-object distinction, since in the experience of wonder, agency and receptivity are inverted, with the human subject becoming the receptive “object” of the thing, field, or moment (what I shorthand as “other”), which is “acting” upon the

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2014), lxxvii.

² José Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses: Authorized Translation from the Spanish* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1932), 12.

³ Edmund Husserl developed the notion of *epoché* around 1906, which he also called “bracketing.” It was a mode of description that was “first person” to ensure a proper description of the object of reflection, as immediately experienced by the subject reflecting. See: Christian Beyer, “Edmund Husserl,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2018), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/husserl/>, accessed January 30, 2019.

⁴ In Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxvii.

⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “In Praise of Philosophy,” *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Alden L. Fisher (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969), 23, 25.

⁶ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 132.

self. Third, to move beyond the rigid subject-object dualism, I explore the notion of “shared enfleshment” of the human and her world, as forming a “communion” in the lifeworld. Here I engage the insights of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Gabriel Marcel because their respective explorations get behind the subjective intentionality, exploring the pre-mental, pre-conscious lived life. Fourth, I place the “axis” of wonder in this “communal” ontology, suggesting that a “ontological tension” is at the heart of wonder. This tension exists between being-lost or dissolved in wonder and being-found-anew or rediscovered in wonder. In this fourth section, I show how in wonder, one is concurrently aware in an intense way of the other grasping one in wonder and aware in an intensely way of oneself in wonder’s grasp. Fifth, I move to the “mechanics” of wonder, seeking to understand the “axis” of wonder. The question here is: What is it about the other eliciting wonder and about the self susceptible to wonder, respectively, that makes possible the experience of wonder in the lifeworld. I explore the notions of human affect and “sensation-*hyle*” as the intersecting planes of the axis of wonder.

Why Phenomenology?

But why the phenomenological approach and not some other method of inquiry? I assume that in some way subject matter determines method. Wonder is deeply, thoroughly *experiential* and *subjective*, which is the arena of transcendental reduction. D. Woodruff Smith is right in enumerating the “core fields” of philosophy as ontology, epistemology, ethics, and logic, each one grounded in a certain domain—being, knowing, acting, and reasoning. He adds phenomenology as a fifth, whose domain is “experience.”⁷ Rather than compartmentalize, I

⁷ David Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Winter 2016), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology/>, accessed March 23, 2018. As Smith highlights, the argument is still open as to which of these fields is the “first philosophy,” the one on which all other philosophical inquiry rests. He posits that Socrates and Plato made ethics primary; and Aristotle did so with ontology. For Descartes it was epistemology, for Russell it was logic, and for Husserl it was phenomenology. Since

recognize here that the one has implications for the others—thus, how one understands *being* informs what one defines as right and wrong acts (ethics).⁸ Yet without rigidly separating spheres of inquiry, it can nonetheless be maintained that where one starts will inevitably shape what emerges from the investigation.

Since wonder is deeply experiential, it is appropriate to ground this exploration of wonder in the field that begins with experience. Paul C. Taylor rightly defines phenomenology as the philosophy of *conscious* experience that gives primacy to *immediacy*, *environment*, and *embodiment*.⁹ As I discuss below, wonder is: immediately experience; situated and informed by “place”; and a bodily experience. Phenomenology is a descriptively incisive method, making it ideal for honing in on wonder as experienced.

Wonder’s Grasp (Or, On Being Grasped by Wonder)

George Santayana is right to say that a “philosopher is compelled to follow the maxim of the epic poets and to plunge *in media res*,”¹⁰ for even if she starts “in the middle,” it will still be a “beginning” of sorts.¹¹ We likewise are “compelled” to begin this transcendental reduction of wonder *in media res*—in wonder immediately experience. Thus, the basic components must be named, and then examined within their shared horizon.

the twentieth century, and in light of modern social, political and racialized reality, philosophy has “partnered,” if you will, with other disciplines, partnership which have then morphed and expansion the philosophical tasks and the categories included therein. For example, many authors of color writing on some of these realities are categorized under “cultural studies,” when in fact, they are, in this author’s opinion, doing philosophy. (Exploring the racist ideologies that give rise to this mis-categorization is beyond the scope of this present study.)

⁸ Phenomenologists assert that its domain covers all other domains, that is, that it is the umbrella under which all the other domains rests. Cf. Woodruff Smith, “Phenomenology,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>. Husserl went as far as to propose that the “insights” phenomenology “yield truths of a purely a priori character.” See: Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 133.

⁹ Taylor, *Race: A Philosophical Introduction*, 147–48.

¹⁰ George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith: Introduction to a System of Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), 1.

¹¹ Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 2.

Let's imagine a moment of intense wonder, a moment that remains so vivid that the memory of it becomes itself another object of wonder. When one grows up on the Great Plains of the Midwest United States, the first glimpse of the Rocky Mountains can take one's breath away. This reaction is not merely reflective, as in a mental intrigue, but *bodily*. The sight *takes one's breath away*. The subject experiences wonder.

Yet, this sensation is *about something*, in this case, the Rockies. There is something outside the sensing subject that is drawing her attention, something *objective*, something "out there." There is a subject and an object. And there is a relation between them. These three components—subject, object, relation—make up the basic anatomy of wonder. Let's explore these a bit more.

While experiencing wonder, one might immediately conclude that wonder, like consciousness, is intentional.¹² Yet in reality one does not simply wonder; rather, one wonders *at*, or wonders *about*. It has content, toward which the one who wonders is drawn. Wonder is directed at or drawn to some other object given to consciousness. One cannot simply wonder without an object. Like consciousness, wonder always has an object, even if it is itself—wondering about wonder, as this dissertation is doing. Even if the refutation is raised that one can wonder about oneself, and therefore there is no "outside object," there would still—even here—be an object, namely, the "self" (however understood). Wondering about oneself is *experienced* as intentional—meaning that when one focuses on self-awareness and introspection, one experiences it as if one is standing outside oneself and seeing oneself in some way. One brackets

¹² See Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 49.

oneself in that moment. As Merleau-Ponty posits, the very “essence of consciousness” is the “rediscovering [of] that actual presence of myself to myself.”¹³

So, we can already suggest that the transcendental moment of consciousness (i.e. reduction) can be equated with or linked to the experience of wonder, since wonder includes the conscious self that is directed in a focused way toward an object. But is this actually the case? Is wonder the general activity of the intentional consciousness, or maybe even its primordial activity? Is wonder epochal (as is *epoché*)? Although wonder is intentional, consciousness cannot be contained totally under the canopy of wonder. There are plenty of moments when the consciousness is acting intentionally yet does not experience wonder. Hence the aforementioned suggestion cannot be substantiated.

For a moment, let us look at the “grammar”¹⁴ of wonder, namely, the language and communicative conventions to discuss or describe wonder, to see what vistas open up.¹⁵ When describing the experience of wonder, one typically speaks of “being grasped” by the moment, object, or event; or of something “overtaking” or “taking over” one’s senses or even one’s body, of being “taken aback”:

“The Rockies *take my breath away*.” [Example mentioned above]

“The ending of this opera, with its sights and senses, *captivates me* every time.”

“I *was overtaken by* the Northern lights swirling above us.”

Such experiences are typically described in such a way that the wondering subject is *not*, paradoxically, the *agent* in the act of wonder, but seemingly the one *passively experiencing* the

¹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxix.

¹⁴ This language is borrowed from Sophia Vasalou’s treatise on wonder. See *Wonder: A Grammar* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015).

¹⁵ Christian Beyer highlights how Edmund Husserl’s mathematical influences leads him to conclude that each science is “a system of propositions that are interconnected by a set of inferential relations.” Thus, to understand these systems, argued Husserl, a look at “linguistic manifestations” was necessary. (See Beyer, “Edmund Husserl,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/husserl/>.)

moment of wonder. The subject-in-wonder is not even the initiator of the wonder-full episode. The moment of wonder is described in first-person but in *passive* ways. In other languages, “wonder” can only be parsed in passive ways.¹⁶ The experience of wonder is not a result of one’s *agency* and *activity*, but of one’s *receptivity*. Wonder, at least its initial impact on the subject, cannot be premeditated, calendared, or organized. One is not, in this sense, the *subject* of wonder; one is the *object* of wonder. We do not act *on* wonder; rather, wonder acts *on us*.

So, we must correct the previous assertion that wonder is a form of phenomenological reduction. Wonder is not subjectively epochal, for the *epoché* is the activity of the subject. In the transcendental act of reduction, one is the subject; in wonder, one is not. Now to be sure wonder may operate within bracketed reflection in that it may linger while reflection focuses on the phenomenon (say, the Rockies) originally given to consciousness by wonder. Wonder may carry through to the act of conscious reflection in the object about which one wonders (awe or wonder at the change in earth’s landscape).

If we are the recipients in the moment of wonder, then it can be said that wonder precedes the conscious act of reflection. It is *pre-reflective*, acting on the subject and not the other way around. It seems therefore that the statement, “wonder is epochal,” needs revision and nuancing. The *epoché* is the reflective action of the subject, in which the subject is active. Conversely, the subject is passive in the moment of wonder. Wonder, as experienced, acts on the consciousness. That is, the subject is passive: one *receives* the moment of wonder, as it acts upon me. “*I was overtaken by...*”

Yet, some semblances remain. Wonder acts on the consciousness in a way similar to the way the consciousness acts intentionally, in the act of reduction, on phenomena given to it. In the

¹⁶ In Spanish, for example, the verb “to wonder” (*asombrarse*, *maravillarse*), is always passive. One does not ever say, “I wonder” but literally, “I am/was wondered by”—hence the suffix, “-se.”

bracketed intention, one focuses, in a reflective way, in on what is being given. In a mirrored way, in the moment of wonder, one *is focused by* something from without. In other words, the event or object that induces wonder comes, in a way, already focused. It comes to the pre-reflective consciousness *already bracketed, in a sense*. “I was gripped by ...*the sunlight ...the ritual*.” As experiences, wonder focuses perception on the object or event causing the wonder.

A different claim regarding wonder emerges at this point in the reflection: *the initial experience of wonder is a self-bracketing event given to the pre-reflective consciousness*. The moment of wonder that grips comes bracketed to consciousness. It is given to consciousness already focused, with “brackets,” but these focusing brackets are not placed there by the perceiver herself. One does not determine the parameters of one’s focus in the event of wonder; rather, they are pre-determined, they are prior to one’s reductive act. Wonder is always a focused moment, whether it is the whole “field”¹⁷ giving itself (e.g. a romantic dinner with the white tablecloths, the candles, the dimmed lighting, the beloved awaiting one’s embrace) or a singular pixel within that field (e.g. the lover’s twinkling eyes within the “field” of the romantic dinner). In either case, the initial gripping of the wonder-filled moment is a focused perceptual or sensual (as in the senses) event prior to the subject’s act of bracketing. Indeed, it can be said that it is the distinct contours given pre-reflectively that pull or draw—or *grip*—one’s attention away from all else. Wonder, as experienced, is self-bracketing.

This leads to another question, one that will drastically redirect our query: if one is the recipient and not the agent in the experience of wonder, does this mean that wonder *qua* wonder resides elsewhere? Does wonder come from without, emerging from some other agent besides

¹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 224

the conscious subject gripped by wonder? Linguistic conventions and experiential evidence of wonder do seem to suggest this.

Yet the visceral and bodily experience of wonder seems to be a dialectical moment in that the grip of wonder comes from *without* and yet it is sensed *within*. We “feel it” in our bodies. (“The Rockies *take my breath away*.”) It remains in us even if we are not the origin of wonder’s activity but merely the locus of its reception. (A similar dilemma is what initiates Heidegger’s reflection on art: does “art” reside in the “artist” or in the “artwork”?¹⁸) This dialectic of experienced wonder can be phrased differently: the gripping of wonder is not enacted *by* the wonderer; yet it is enacted *in* the wonderer. It acts on the consciousness and thus rests squarely within the consciousness. Is there a contradiction here? Can wonder both act upon the consciousness from without while resting within consciousness? If, in fact, wonder acts upon us, if it “grips” us rather than us gripping it, whose “hands” are doing the gripping?

This leads us to a larger question about the rigid and strong subject/object distinction in thought after Descartes. The Cartesian revolution cemented this assumption in the philosophical task. Yet if this notion of the isolated-subject-observing-objects were to be operative in this query of wonder, one would find oneself at an irresolvable conundrum; for wonder cannot be squarely “placed” in the subject-turned-object of wonder (since it does not arise from her), and it cannot be placed in “the things themselves” because, quite plainly, things, *precisely in their thingliness*, are rendered non-subjective (i.e. objectified) from the perspective of Cartesian consciousness, thus rendering them essentially passive. In short, from this dichotomous presupposition, one can only deduce that there is no place for wonder to lay its head.

¹⁸ See: Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Off the Beaten Path*, ed. and trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–56.

To move forward in hopes of locating wonder's habitation or "habit," two tasks lie before us. The first calls for replacing the subject-object distinction with another "structure" of experience, as this Cartesian reification is unable to account *fully* for the experience of wonder, which comes to the subject *from without* and yet is experienced *within*. The second task is a consequence of the first, namely, questioning the profile of thingliness generally, and its passivity especially, and re-articulating them in ways more compatible with the experience of wonder. Let us explore each of these in turn.

From Subject/Object Distinction to Participating in an Enfleshed Communion

Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty overcome this isolated-subject-observing-objects by placing "being" and "body"/"flesh," respectively, in the world. The subject is not some separate or detached mind standing above that which she observes, unaffected by the ground upon which she stands. This is, in fact, Heidegger's undoing of Husserl's conclusions by using Husserl's method. Heidegger deduces that the reflective task is embedded in an un-reflective "coping," or "attunements," that preceded conscious acts. For Heidegger, Husserl enters the reductive task "one crucial step too late."¹⁹ As *Dasein*, the subject is first a part of this world, "coping" and "attuned" to the world in an unreflective way.²⁰ And even when the subject becomes conscious of her being-in-the-world, that being-in-thought is nonetheless a being-in-the-world, inseparable from the world. (Or as Sartre would put it, the being-for-itself is tied to the being-in-itself.²¹)

For Heidegger, this move bears upon the present question of wonder for two reasons. First, if one is seeking to get "to the things themselves" (as Husserlian phenomenology attempts

¹⁹ Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-In-The-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991); idem., "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise (2005)," in *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action*, ed. Mark A Wrathall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 104 ff.

²⁰ Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-In-The-World*, 13 ff.

²¹ Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 119 ff.

to do), and if the “thing itself” in question is the human being, then one must start *prior to* consciously reflective being and to the modifications that merged from reflective thought—in short, to the “coping” or “attuned” being, to “everyday human existence” (a possible colloquialism of *Dasein*).²² As everyday human existence, *Dasein* is to be “understood to be more basic than mental states and their intentionality.”²³ For this reason, Heidegger resists equating *Dasein* with “consciousness,” deeming any such attempts to be “thwarted.”²⁴ In this sense, parallels can be made between this pre-conscious *Dasein* and Merleau-Ponty’s non-thetic “brute being” (*être brut*), or “primitive being” (*être primitif*), or “animal faith” (*foi animale*).²⁵ Indeed, Heidegger’s being-there is his attempt “to liberate the determination of human nature from the concept of subjectivity.”²⁶ This move to the pre-conscious being is fruitful, for, as stated above, the experience of wonder happens prior to the conscious act of reflection and it happens in conscious relation to the world. Therefore, wonder and its human experience must be understood at the level of attunements, which is “more basic than [and prior to] mental states and their intentionality.”

Second, this Heideggerian move matters for the understanding of wonder because the “being there” softens any attempt at a rigid or sharp subject-object distinction, thus generating new possibilities for placing wonder. For Heidegger, *Dasein* describes both “the involvement of being in human nature and the essential relation of man to that openness (‘there’) of being as

²² Dreyfus, *Being-In-The-World*, 13ff.

²³ Dreyfus, *Being-In-The-World*, 13.

²⁴ Heidegger, “The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics,” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 270–71. In Dreyfus, *Being-In-The-World*, 13.

²⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible, Followed by Working Notes*. ed. Claude Lefort. trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 3. Cf. Daniela Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 64. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of “animal faith” resembles in some ways Santayana’s notion by the same name. See the latter’s *Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 6ff.

²⁶ Heidegger, “The Way Back Into the Ground of Metaphysics,” 270.

such.”²⁷ In other words, to speak of the human as *Dasein* is always to speak of her not simply as being but as being *there*—that is, in place. To speak of the human without her emplacement in the world would be to miss her entirely.

Marcel concurs with Heidegger’s foundational premise in stating, “An individual is not distinct from his place. He *is* his place;”²⁸ and with Ortega y Gasset’s declaration that, “I am I and my circumstance; and, if I do not save it, I do not save myself.”²⁹ As a being that *exists*, i.e. “stand out” [*ex + sistere*], its “taking a stand” [*sistere*] is part and parcel of its constitution.

Again, the relief this offers for our query of wonder is obvious. The experience of wonder happens to the subject as she stands not *above* things, but *before* and *within* the field of things appearing before her perceptual field.³⁰ By speaking of the pre-intentional being as a being in place, a “region” is opened to speak not only of the perceiver and perceived but of *their relation to each other* in the moment of wonder.

It can be said that this is where both Merleau-Ponty and Gabriel Marcel pick up and Heidegger left off, namely at the place where being “stands out” within and before—and not above—the horizon of its *thereness*. For Merleau-Ponty, that “being there” takes a stand as an embodied “there,” an *enfleshed* “being-in-the-world.” The function that “being” plays in Heidegger is filled in Merleau-Ponty by the “body,” and later by “flesh.”³¹ Merleau-Ponty adds that the body is not *in the world* as some object, but rather the body is the “general means of *having* a world.”³² He posits, “Nothing determines me from outside, not because nothing acts

²⁷ Heidegger, “The Way Back Into the Ground of Metaphysics,” 270.

²⁸ Quoted in Edward C. Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion Limited, 1976), 43.

²⁹ José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote*, ed. Evelyn Rugg and Julián Marías (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 45.

³⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 52–65, 252.

³¹ Many have speculated as to the shift from primarily “body” language in *Phenomenology of Perception* to “flesh” in *The Visible and The Invisible*. See Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, 59 ff.

³² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 147; 140–41.

upon me, but, on the contrary, because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world.”³³ Moreover, the converse is also true: The world is open to me, and it is open to me because it too is enfleshed. As he asserts, “The flesh is at the heart of the world,”³⁴ and both I-in-the-world and the world share in this “heart.” That is, that one’s body is the “flesh that emerges in the flesh of the world.”³⁵

By proposing that all is “flesh” and all shares in this enfleshment, Merleau-Ponty puts skin on Heidegger’s *Dasein*, but does not trap that being-there in its skin. The body is not a self-contained *object* because the skin is porous. Drawing upon both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Vallega-Neu posits that a phenomenological account of the body does not see it as “body-object” or a “mute impenetrable mass of organs, tissues, bones, and skin,” but instead as “occurrences,” “movements,” “desires,” “resistances,” “directionalities,” and so forth.³⁶ For this reason, she speaks in a nuanced way of the “bodily *dimensions*” of thinking, of the *Leib* “that we *are*” and not the *Körper* that we have.³⁷

In a similar vein, Marcel develops his notion of *disponibilité*, a human “availability” rooted in the “lived body.”³⁸ This “body-subject” (*les corps-sujet*), as opposed to “body-object,” is “the first significance of availability.”³⁹ Marcel argues that we get to truth not by detaching ourselves from our body or our bodily situation, but “by probing more intensely into it” as

³³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 483.

³⁴ In Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, 60; cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 135.

³⁵ Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, 60.

³⁶ Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, xiv-xv.

³⁷ Vallega-Neu, *The Bodily Dimension in Thinking*, xv.

³⁸ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 198-199; cf. Joe McCown, *Availability: Gabriel Marcel and the Phenomenology of Human Openness*. Studies in Religion Series, No. 14 (Missoula, MT: Published by Scholars Press for the American Academy of Religion, 1978), 10.

³⁹ McCown, *Availability*, 25, 30-31.

subject and not object.⁴⁰ When dealt with as object, this “personal body loses its character of subjectivity.”⁴¹ As objects, we treat the body as a tool or instrument for power, instead of as *les corps-sujet*, which “presences” me to the world, as “a living center,” “a landmark (*repère*) upon the world.”⁴² Marcel’s “my body” intends to show the ambiguous yet inescapable link between “being in the first person and the body of this being.”⁴³

What Marcel affords the me-body relation, he extends in an analogous way to the body-world relation. The lived body is “a presence,” which is available both to oneself and to others.⁴⁴ He writes that the relations one has with the world “are of the same type as my relations with my own body.”⁴⁵ Since the relation between the person and her body *as lived* is essentially “ambiguous” and ultimately a “mystery,”⁴⁶ so is her relation to the world—which the term “presence” attempts to denote.

Moreover, Marcel analogously extends the me-body relation into the body-world in yet another crucial way. Since the lived body defies objectification, he consequently speaks of “existing objects” near the subject-body as also transcending pure or complete objectivity.⁴⁷ This move is similar to Merleau-Ponty’s thesis of the shared “flesh” between the body and the world that grounds sensation as a “communion.”⁴⁸ Marcel concludes, “This amounts to saying that my body is *in sympathy with things*.”⁴⁹ This “sympathy,” or “affections of our bodies,” is “fundamental” to the body as lived, in that things and other beings affect our bodies through an

⁴⁰ McCown, *Availability*, 27.

⁴¹ McCown, *Availability*, 28-29.

⁴² Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, trans. Bernard Wall (London: Rockliff, 1952), 268–69.

⁴³ McCown, *Availability*, 28.

⁴⁴ Marcel, *Being and Having*, 198-199.

⁴⁵ Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 269.

⁴⁶ Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 279–80; cf. McCown, *Availability*, 30.

⁴⁷ Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 279–80.

⁴⁸ *Phenomenology of Perception*, 221, 334.

⁴⁹ Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 274.

Urgefüh—a “primal feeling” of being affected. This *Urgefüh* cannot be known, precisely because it *is* fundamental—the foundation of any other “feeling.” For Marcel, this feeling is more of a “sensing.” The body is the *necessary* condition for any object to be given to our attentive consideration.⁵⁰ As something “always” and “already” available to the surroundings and to a social world,⁵¹ the body-subject is the avenue through which the world gets our attention.

Again, the potential of Merleau-Ponty’s and Marcel’s shared insights for our study of wonder are evident. Wonder originates without yet rests within the subject which “from the start outside [ones]self.” We are “caught in the fabric of the world.”⁵² To quote Merleau-Ponty at length:

If I find, while reflecting upon the essence of the body, that it is tied to the essence of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is identical with my existence as a body and with the existence of the world, and because, ultimately, the subject that I am, understood concretely, is inseparable from this particular body and from this particular world.⁵³

Merleau-Ponty’s discovery regarding the open relation and intersectionality between the “I” and the “world” is played out noticeably in wonder’s grip. What he affirms of the inseparability of “the essence of the body” and “the essence of the world” can also be said of the experience of wonder: “Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself.”⁵⁴ It seems then that this “open” inside of consciousness, when gripped, is the *axis* of wonder.

⁵⁰ In McCown, *Availability*, 31; Rudolph Gerber argues that the lived is “an inseparable and irreducible matrix of all existential structures of consciousness.” See his “Marcel and the Experiential Road to Metaphysics,” *Philosophy Today*, 22 no. 4 (1968): 271.

⁵¹ McCown, *Availability*, 25.

⁵² Quoted in Lawrence Hass, *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 138.

⁵³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 431.

⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 430.

Likewise, Marcel softens the rigid subject-object distinction, creating more fecund ground upon which the wonder-gripping-from-without-but-felt-within can make sense. For Marcel, we give attention through a “sensing” (*le sentir*) that is both “an entirely internal conscious state” *and* “an impression that the world makes upon the body-subject.”⁵⁵ This “sensing” is ambiguous on purpose.⁵⁶ *Le sentir* is both our “sense” of our bodies and our bodies’ “available” sense toward the world.

As the sensing of a body-subject (and not a body-object), it is not merely “communication;” rather, it is a “communion,” in which we “participate.” For *les corps-sujet*, it is “an immediate *participation* of what we commonly call the subject in a surroundings from which no veritable frontiers separate him.”⁵⁷ To be clear, Marcel uses “participation” not in the Platonic sense of participating in a higher principle (something explored in the follow chapter of this treatise), but as a sharing in common of a “atmosphere of understanding or celebrating.”⁵⁸ Similar to Merleau-Ponty, who speaks of sensation as a “communion,”⁵⁹ Marcel, speaks of “communion” as *Mitsein* (“with-being”).⁶⁰ “With” is not to be understood instrumentally, since the body is *sujet*, not *objet*. With objects, the preposition is “alongside” or “beside” but not “with.” McCown argues that in French, “with” (*avec, chez*) connotes a sense of intimacy not found in its English equivalent (except perhaps when used sexually or relationally).⁶¹

This participatory communion is possible because we are not “objects,” but “presences.” Our presencing is something deeply embedded in our being that it is hard to articulate and even

⁵⁵ McCown, *Availability*, 31-32; cf. Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 268–71.

⁵⁶ McCown, *Availability*, 32.

⁵⁷ Quoted in McCown, *Availability*, 33.

⁵⁸ McCown, *Availability*, 34.

⁵⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 221, 334; cf. McCown, *Availability*, 34.

⁶⁰ Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 163.

⁶¹ McCown, *Availability*, 40; cf. Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 170.

to see. “We *are* this personal world, we do not see it.”⁶² Moreover, as McCown submits—this is crucial in light of wonder—“A presence refuses to allow us to posit it in a definite region of space... The space of presence is more like musical space than geometric space.” He concludes, “Presence goes out from one person to another and will be the possession of no one.”⁶³ Presence simply arises from intersubjectivity, wherein “before me” and “in me” are not distinct.⁶⁴ In other words, it remains in that “place” of intersubjectivity, even as it is being “sensed” (in its Marcelian meaning) between human presences or between human presence and a world “presencing” itself to the human presence.

Hence, the “subject” in the subject/object distinction is not a distant observer, unaffected by her surroundings, standing *above* with detached vision of objects “out there.” Rather, the subject stands “sympathetically” within and amidst things and others; it is an enfleshed, embodied “being *there*,” with the “there” being an essential part of the “being.” It is “presencing” among and amidst things, rather than observing things at a “subjective” distance.

Yet, the assertions made here go beyond the subject as *agent*. The body subject is radically opened to the world—out in the world. And she is opened *by* the world, and the world is, thus, in her as much as she is in the world.⁶⁵ She is also *recipient*, a *receptive* presence. This epistemological shift from agency to receptivity is no small move. Here one can recall from Heidegger’s aesthetic philosophy his definitional inversion of *technē* to mean not an “acting-

⁶² Gabriel Marcel, “Theism and Personal Relationship,” *Cross Currents* 1, no. 1 (1950): 37; McCown, *Availability*, 41.

⁶³ McCown, *Availability*, 41; cf. Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being: II. Faith and Reality* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 17.

⁶⁴ In McCown, *Availability*, 42.

⁶⁵ When describing “subject” [‘the *cogito*’] in the world, Merleau-Ponty writes, “The interior and the exterior are inseparable. The world is entirely on the inside, and I am entirely outside of myself.” In *Phenomenology of Perception*, 430.

upon” but a “being-acted-upon.”⁶⁶ For these reasons, the subject—the embodied subject or “presence”—“sympathizes” with her surroundings, recognizing in others and even in things a shared enfleshment. They participate in a *communion*.

To be clear, this move toward a communion is not a total undoing of the subject; for that matter, neither is it the dissolution of the object. For to deny their distinction entirely would be, logically, to deny their respective integrities. The argument here is a weak one. It affirms the difference between “presences,” human and non-human, but interrelates them in a mutually enriching way. Here, Brian Massumi’s process aesthetics⁶⁷ are helpful, particularly his tempered use of the notion of “event.” He contends that event, in which entities find themselves and in which they interrelate, does soften the subject/object, knower/knower, or artist/art distinction. Yet, he criticizes when this is taken to an extreme so that the artist and the art piece are completely dissolved and disintegrate into one another. For Massumi, the way forward is neither strong dichotomy nor total dissolution.⁶⁸ The path forward also goes beyond the isolationist approaches that are diminished either to the “objective” *thing* or to the “subjective” *experience*.⁶⁹ Both subject and object are “real.” Yet, for both to be truly understood, one must see them, jointly, as “events,” the essence or substance of a thing is one with “the event.”

The Axis of Wonder as an Event of “Ontological Tension”

This event-full structure of communion offers a possible habitat for the axis of wonder proposed thus far. For the subject-object distinction is unhelpful when describing a wonder that grips one from without yet is felt within. Marcel’s “space of presence” that “will be the

⁶⁶ Heidegger argues that this inversion is more “radical,” as in going to the root of the word. Thus, instead of *technē* denoting a silversmith working on silver (“doing-to”), it connotes the silver “resisting” and “giving way to,” shaping in order to be shaped by the silversmith. In his “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 34 ff.

⁶⁷ Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts*. Technologies of Lived Abstraction (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 1 ff.

⁶⁸ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 5–6.

⁶⁹ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 6.

possession of no one” makes an axis of wonder that is situated “between” the experiencer of wonder and that event or thing which “grasps” one in wonder.

What is needed for to make phenomenological sense is to posit that wonder is to be placed *in the world*. The axis of wonder eventuates (as in “event”) in a “third place” marked by relational-qualitative “differential.”⁷⁰ Massumi speaks of events as having two dimensions or “immediacies of process.” One, there is a “relational” dimension, which is “the event under the aspect of its immediate participation in a world of activity larger than its own.” Meaning, the event emerges and “stands out” within a wider field of activity and change. And two, there’s a “qualitative” dimension, that is, it is the event’s “quality,” its “immediate enjoyment of the specialness of its holding itself together in just the way it comes to do.” The first speaks to its being part of a whole; the latter, as a unique manifestation of the whole, which is “registers” the new activity that is unfolding from the already-there activity.⁷¹ The relational and the qualitative “co-occur.”⁷²

Since they are co-occurring, Massumi speaks of these two dimensions coming together as a “differential” and not as a “dichotomy.”⁷³ This “relational-qualitative duplicity” signals “differences in manner of activity *between* which things happen.” In fact, he adds, “The coming-together of the differences *as such*... constitutes a formative force.” The differential is never “erased.” Instead, between the relational and the qualitative, “they co-compose a singular effect of unity” precisely in their coming-together while maintaining-difference.⁷⁴ Moreover, Massumi add that this differential cannot be “overlaid” by the subject-object dichotomy. Although

⁷⁰ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 3–5.

⁷¹ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 3–4.

⁷² Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 4.

⁷³ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 5.

⁷⁴ Massumi, *Semblance and Event*, 5.

Massumi does not cite or mention Kitarō Nishida, one can detect the latter's notion of "basho"⁷⁵ in the former's concept of relational-qualitative differential.

The event of wonder, I propose, is an intense experience of this relational-qualitative differential.⁷⁶ In the moment of wonder, two (seemingly) diametrically-opposed experiences "co-occur." On the one hand, there is a strong relation, nearing self-dissolution, between the observer grasped by wonder and the other eliciting wonder. One is "lost" in the event of wonder. To borrow from scientists Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, who sought to develop "conceptual approach to awe," the experience of wonder is characterized by "perceived vastness" (physical or theoretical) and a "need for accommodation," since wonder and its resulting awe "disrupts" one's "normal understanding of the world."⁷⁷ As Massumi stated, the relational dimension is one in which the event is perceived from the backdrop of "a world of activity larger than its own." In wonder, one becomes subsumed by the event.

Yet, on the other hand, one is deeply aware of or attuned to the other eliciting wonder, and through it, interestingly, one is deeply aware or attuned to oneself as the object of wonder's grasp. The other eliciting wonder is seen intensely and "in detail"—to used broadcasting language, "in hi-def!" The experience of wonder is never vague or nebulous. The particularities

⁷⁵ Kitarō Nishida develops the logic of basho as a "place" (or *topos*) wherein a dialectic is preserved *without* synthesis (counter Hegel). See: Kitarō Nishida, "Basho," in *Place and Dialectic: Two Essays*, trans. John W. M. Krummel and Shigenori Nagatomo, AAR Religions in Translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 49–101.

⁷⁶ Making this connection is not farfetched when considering that Massumi's concept emerges from his work on art and aesthetics, a field of inquiry in which the experience of wonder is typical a constitutive element.

⁷⁷ In Greater Good Science Center, and Summer Allen, *The Science of Awe*, A white paper prepared for the John Templeton Foundation by the Greater Good Science Center at University of California Berkeley (September 2018): 2–3; cf. Dacher J. Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, "Approaching Awe, a Moral, Spiritual, and Aesthetic emotion," *Cognition and Emotion*, 17, no. 2 (2003), 297–314.

of the other shine through. Whether it is the whole perceptual field or a pixel, one sees it richly and clearly.

Moreover, even while by deeply attuned to the other eliciting wonder, one is becoming attuned to oneself. In fact, one's deep sense of oneself comes about *through* the deep sensuous encounter with the other eliciting. One re-engages oneself in being engage "thaumatically" (Greek: *thauma*, *thaumazō*) by the other. Hence, I most pushback to notions of *total* lostness and "self-diminishment" in the event of wonder.⁷⁸ The being-lost in wonder is never fully actualized, since at that point of deep relational depth with the other, a qualitative depth, both of oneself and the other, co-emerges.

At the point when one becomes *epistemologically* lost in the "perceived vastness" of the event, one *ontologically* finds oneself anew. By noticing the other in "hi-def," one takes note anew of one's own being-in-the-world. It is in this sense that the event of wonder is an intense experience of the relational-qualitative differential. Wonder is both an ontology and an epistemological reality.

Marcel speak of an "ontological mystery" at the heart of the inquiry into being.⁷⁹ I speak here of an "ontological tension" at the heart of the event of wonder. There is both near self-diminishment and intense self-discovery in being grasped by wonder. One is both "lost and found": lost in the "vastness" and intensity of the event and of the other that elicits wonder; and found in and through being elicited into a wonder-filled gaze of the other. The intense awareness of the other comes with, without resolution or synthesis, the intense aware of oneself. Hence, *the experience of wonder is a dialectic between familiarity and dissimilarity, between "sympathetic" semblance and disruptive difference, of identity (as in 'identify with') and difference.*

⁷⁸ Greater Good Science Center, *The Science of Awe*, 3.

⁷⁹ Marcel, *Mystery of Being II*, 18.

Again, I must note here what I mention above regarding the “activity” of the other grasping in wonder and the “receptivity” of oneself as *being grasped*. The dichotomy of pure subjectivity-objectivity cannot make sense of the experience of wonder. Objects, in the event wonder, are more merely “Things,” passive and inanimate. They are “peculiar and complex,”⁸⁰ exhibiting an ability to “act” on subjects, turning these into their “objects.” The framework of event as a relational-qualitative differential elucidates the dimensions of wonder and its grounding “ontological tension.”

This discovery of the “ontological tension” in wonder is, to be sure, an essential insight into wonder as such. Yet, to understand and articulate how this tension *grounds* the experience of wonder is beyond the reach of phenomenology. The *epoché* reveal this “ontological tension” but cannot explain how it “stands under” (*substantia*) wonder. This is a metaphysical question raised by the phenomenological method. (Answering this metaphysically is the subject of the next chapter.)

From “To the Things Themselves” to “From the Things Themselves”: The “Mechanics” of Wonder

While this “ontological tension” as the *substantia* of wonder is beyond phenomenology’s reach, one can continue to further explore, from the plane of immediate experience, the inverting roles of “subject” and “object” in the event of wonder. Within the “brackets” of the *epoché*, one can investigate the “mechanics” at play in the event of wonder. We ask here: What is it about one’s receptivity or *disponibilité*, that can be susceptible to the thaumatic activity of the other

⁸⁰ Beatrice Marovich, “Creaturely Things: Living Matter, Dead Matter, and the Resonance of Actual Entities,” in *The Allure of Things: Process and Object in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Roland Faber and Andrew Goffey, Bloomsbury Studies in Philosophy (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 112.

upon one's self? What is it about the "other" (*even* objects like a rock, "the symbol of dead matter"⁸¹) that allows it to "act," to "grasp" the person in wonder?

It is not surprising that human presence is both agency and receptivity. The shock of wonder is the other's active grasp, especially when it is "just a rock." For what is typically deemed a mere *passive* object cannot so easily be objectified; nor can it be delimited by its mere passivity. It not only *gives* itself to the subject. It *grips*, *actively* demanding the subject's gaze and eventual attention, in a way inverting the active-subject/passive-object assumption. This leads us therefore to reconsider what we mean by "object" or "thing."

It is important to take note of what is implied by the conclusion regarding the inverted activity/passivity between subject and object in the event of wonder. In heightening the receptivity—the *disponibilité*—of the subject, we are implying the "presencing," or at least capacity for "presencing," of things. This logical implication is the rejection of the detached subject *over* the world and the affirmation of a shared, embodied presence *amidst* and *within* the world.

For if the "subject," previously presupposed with its hard, Cartesian contours, is now redefined phenomenologically as an open, presencing I, then one is forced to revisit the "object," since the definition of object *qua* object is dependent upon the definition of subject *qua* subject. In other words, if we are speaking of an "axis of wonder," and if one of the variables (i.e. "subject") revolving around and intersecting through that axis has been re-articulated, then the other variable ("object") is consequently re-articulated as well. So, what needs to be said differently of things, of objects?

⁸¹ Marovich, "Creaturely Things," 109.

Traditionally, things are described as passive, static entities, and it is the human knower who brings activity—by her knowing of things—to the relation between the two. Yet, we have seen above that the act of *knowing* things is a second-tier stage of the human’s engagement with the world. First-tier or primal relationships to the world are not ones of rationality and active knowing, but rather of receptivity and pre-reflective, pre-rational “coping” in the world. And, furthermore, it is here, at the pre-rational level, that the experience of wonder first grips one. Wonder is pre-intentional. (The term above that we provisionally used is “self-bracketing.”)

What then can one say of the *active* object to redefine it so as to include in its eidetic reduction a capacity for presencing—that is, for “gripping” and not merely being gripped? Thus far, our study has progressed from Husserl, to Heidegger, and at last, to Merleau-Ponty and Marcel. Yet we need to return to Husserl and his later works, in which he began to see that his schema did not make sense of the pre-intentional, pre-mental states of the subject. This omission meant that one cannot speak to what happen in these states, nor make sense of how to choose to attend to such consciousness. Nor could one explicate how that which is given to consciousness gets the attention of consciousness pre-reflectively, as is the case in the event of wonder.

Husserl addresses this problem on both sides of (pre-)intentionality: that of the consciousness that intends the thing and that of the thing being intended. Regarding the former, he speaks of “affect;”⁸² and for the latter, of *hyle*. Since the task of this section is to redefine

⁸² According to Eric Shouse, neither “affect” nor “affection” “denotes a personal feeling.” Rather it is “a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act.” A “feeling” is “personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling their feelings.” And an “emotion” is “the projection/display of a feeling.” An affect is “a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential.” It is the most abstract of the three terms, and thus cannot be capture fully in language. [See: Eric Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect,” *M/C Journal* 8.6 (2005). <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>>, accessed March 25, 2017.] According to Massumi, affect is the way that the body prepares “itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience.” [In Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect”; cf. Massumi, *Parables for the*

thingliness, I begin with the latter, *hýle*. According to Husserl, the complete *noema* of an experience of perception is not simply its intentional content.⁸³ As Luis Rabanaque highlights, there are layers that Husserl formulates with the term *hýle*, i.e. the “‘natural hyle’ pertaining to the surrounding world of the individual monad,” which is “constituted upon a deeper stratum of ‘sensation-hyle,’”⁸⁴ which is “the phenomenological residuum of the genuine perceptible sides of worldly real things.”⁸⁵ Thus, it is incorrect to understand this *hýle* simply as generic “stuff” or “matter,”⁸⁶ since for Husserl it stands not only for “sensation” but also for the “*transcendental residuum* of sensation.”⁸⁷ It is one of the “constitutive layers” of a thing “as object of sensible experience,”⁸⁸ a “primal impression”⁸⁹ that precedes the act of intentionality and yet remains through the act of intentionality.⁹⁰ According to Husserl, *sensations* are not intentional, though they accompany acts of intentionality.⁹¹ Hence, the complete noema is composed of its intentional content plus its non-thetic, sensuous matter (i.e. *hýle*).⁹²

Thus, *hýle* accounts for both the “pre-givenness (*Vorgegebenheit*) prior to objectivation” of the moment of initial impression and for an “affective structure of the living present.”⁹³

Virtual (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 30]. According to Silvan Tomkins, “the affect mechanism is like the pain mechanism” in that it “amplifies our awareness.” [Tomkins, *Exploring Affect: The Selected Writings of Silvan S. Tompkins*, ed. Virginia E. Demos (New York: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995), 88].

⁸³ Beyer, “Edmund Husserl,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/husserl/>.

⁸⁴ Luis Román Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” *Husserl Studies* 19, no. 3 (2003), 211; also see: Beyer, “Edmund Husserl,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/husserl/>.

⁸⁵ This is a direct quotation from Husserl himself, in Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 211.

⁸⁶ Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 539 n. 73.

⁸⁷ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 207.

⁸⁸ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 209.

⁸⁹ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 210.

⁹⁰ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 208, 211, 213.

⁹¹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 117. Cf. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, V § 14, p. 567.

⁹² Beyer, “Husserl,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/husserl/>. Merleau-Ponty states that “originary perception is a non-thetic, pre-objective, and preconscious experience.” He adds, “Empty and determinate intentions emerge from each point of the primordial field.” (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 252)

⁹³ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 210, 213.

Husserl's favorite example is that of an enduring note played on a violin.⁹⁴ Below, we turn to the stages of wonder, which parallel nicely with this notion of an "affective structure of the living present." As we shall see, wonder is also an enduring note.

By utilizing *hýle* with Husserl to account for the affective "field" of perception,⁹⁵ one is able to get at the moment prior to the intentional act, to Heidegger's pre-mental coping, the moment at which wonder grips the subject. This affective structure (or "affect schema"⁹⁶) speaks to the relation between subjective pre-intentional affect and objective pre-objectified sensuous impression (*hýle*), providing a clear grounding to our developing notion of the axis of wonder at all stages of wonder.

Yet not all those who study affect in Husserl affirm the need for a correlating *hýle*. According to M. Bower, who attempts to read through *and beyond* Husserl on this matter,⁹⁷ pre-intentional perception can be demonstrated to be solely "affectively driven," in that one is "affectively directed toward objects in their full presence in perception," and thus have no *need* for the corresponding *hýle*.⁹⁸ Affective perception, argues Bower, makes sense of the "disturbance" or "surprise"⁹⁹ that occurs when something catches one's eye and demands the attentive gaze, or attracts the ear and lures one to listen intently. To underscore his point, Bower gives this excellent description and illustration:

Affect plays a role in both the experience of an array's, as well as of an individual object's, perceived full presence... [T]here is a basic class of affective states best understood in a practical light as forms of 'action readiness.' This is akin to Husserl's talk of affect as 'allure' (*Reiz*)... One perhaps only catches the slightest glimpse, but it can stir up a more elaborate response, a response to the full object, the object per se. If one

⁹⁴ In Rabanaque, "Hyle, Genesis and Noema," 208, 209, 214.

⁹⁵ Rabanaque, "Hyle, Genesis and Noema," 213.

⁹⁶ Matt Bower, "Affectively Driven Perception: Toward a Non-Representational Phenomenology," *Husserl Studies* 30, no. 3 (2014): 233.

⁹⁷ Bower, "Affectively Driven Perception," 225–45.

⁹⁸ Bower, "Affectively Driven Perception," 233.

⁹⁹ Bower, "Affectively Driven Perception," 235.

incidentally notices a tomato while walking through the grocery store, that ripe red surface may set in motion, via affect, a response going well beyond the item's initially rather meager offering.¹⁰⁰

Bower's goal with "affectively driven perception" is to make *unnecessary* (not nonexistent) the notion of "perceptual sense" of a "hyletic" field. He concludes that affection suffices to explain the pre-intentional "allure" towards attention.¹⁰¹

Yet, as in L. Rabanaque's dual levels discussed above, Bower's own illustration of the alluring redness of a tomato speaks to a sensation-*hýle* deeply embedded in the natural *hýle*, which taps into the subjective affect. His illustration thus voids his attempt at undoing Husserl, and the latter's insight stands. Indeed, "nothing catches one's attention without provoking a perceptual interest," and this affect is "is structurally analogous to perceptual sense."¹⁰² Pre-intentional noticing of wonder is an event between the affective receptivity of the subject and the active sensual (hyletic) matter of the other. Yet it is this "excess-within" of the other that initiates the event, and not the "perceptual sense" of the self.

The Eidos of Wonder

We have now achieved an eidetic reduction of wonder: wonder is *a particularly intense and enduring event between the pre-intentional, affectively-driven subject and the exceeding sensation-hýle of the object eliciting wonder*. Or put different, *wonder is the encounter between the "excess-with" of the other, that acts first, and the available openness of the self*. Wonder happens in the encounter between the driving affect of the perceiver and the active sense of what is perceived. This statement requires some nuancing and further explanation.

1) *Wonder is a particularly intense and enduring event*

¹⁰⁰ Bower, "Affectively Driven Perception," 238–39.

¹⁰¹ Bower, "Affectively Driven Perception," 235, 237.

¹⁰² Bower, "Affectively Driven Perception," 233.

Wonder is a particularly *intense and enduring event*. It is an event in that it involves both subject and object, whose relation is inverted in the moment of wonder. The active subject becomes the recipient receiving the “activity” of an object giving itself in an “exceeding” or “excessive” way to the subject. It is *intense* in that the “excess-within” of the other, and not the subject’s intentionality, directs the subject’s initial gaze, “bombarding”¹⁰³ them in a focused, “self-bracketed” way. It is *enduring* in that after the initial impact of wonder, the subject may remain captivated by the alluring impression of that encounter. (More on the endurance of wonder below.)

When referring to wonder as *event*, it is important here that the dialectic nature of events (in Massumi’s articulation of “event”) be maintained. It is true, per Merleau-Ponty and Marcel, that the body is in the world, and the world in the body; and that they shared enfleshment and emplacement. Yet the body-subject is still distinct from the world “out there.” As stated above, Wonder occurs in the dialectic “place” between “sympathetic” semblance and disruptive difference, between identity and difference. This suggests or intimates this structural tension as the *substantia* of wonder. (Again, this is just a *suggestion*, since demonstrating such a claim falls within the realm of metaphysics and beyond the purview of phenomenology.)

2) *Wonder assumes a pre-intentional and affectively-driven subject*

Wonder is *pre-intentional* in that rather than being directed by conscious intentionality, it is directed by pre-objectified content, by the excessive sensation-hýle of the object gripping the subjective affect. This is the intent behind the possibly ill-phrased—I confess it is ill phrased—proposition that the event of wonder comes “self-bracketed” to consciousness. A distinction is being made here between directionality of consciousness and intentionality. Both affirm the

¹⁰³ Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 215.

consciousness as directed toward things, others, and the world. Yet, the latter implies the rational or at least reflective agency of the subject. In wonder, consciousness is directed pre-rationally.

To say that wonder is *affect-driven* is to say that it is “a non-conscious experience of intensity” and “of unformed and unstructured potential.”¹⁰⁴ It is an “amplified awareness”¹⁰⁵ of the body’s readiness to be encountered by, and to encounter the world—to be affected (as in wonder) and to affect (as in acts of intentionality).¹⁰⁶ As an affect, wonder operates at the level of pre-rational “attunements” to the world.

It may be obvious to the reader that up until this point I have avoided the terms “passion” and “emotion” when speaking of wonder. Clearly this is a dismissal of the precedence found in philosophy (in both east and west).¹⁰⁷ To begin with the assumption of wonder as an emotion would violate the act of transcendental reduction required in phenomenology, for it would be an judgment inserted *prior* to the said reduction. We seek here to get at wonder itself prior to intellection.

Philosophical traditions have predominantly defined wonder as an emotion or passion. Yet, one need only review the cumbersome, linguistic acrobatics of some of those key voices—be it Descartes or contemporary retrievals of Indian philosophies—to define wonder. Descartes lists wonder as “the first of all passions.” That is, he situates it at the *basis* of the emotive life—as *the* pre-emotion.¹⁰⁸ Yet, this priority signals that wonder is precisely an affect, not an emotion. In her comparative theological work on the emotions, Michelle Voss-Roberts draws on ancient

¹⁰⁴ Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect,” <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>.

¹⁰⁵ Tomkins, *Exploring Affect*, 88.

¹⁰⁶ Shouse, “Feeling, Emotion, Affect,” <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>; Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 30; idem., “Notes on the Translation and Acknowledgements,” in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xvi.

¹⁰⁷ Rene Descartes, “On the Passions of the Soul,” 362 ff.; Voss Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine*, 157 ff. Also see Fuller, *Wonder*, 16 ff.

¹⁰⁸ Rene Descartes, “On the Passions of the Soul,” 358.

Indian philosophy (especially Bharata Muni) to discuss human emotion. And like her Western predecessors, she treats wonder *uniquely* within the range of human emotion.¹⁰⁹

There is no denying, based on experience alone, that wonder has an emotional quality to it. Yet, this is due to wonder's affective quality, which is then *accompanied by* feelings and emotions.¹¹⁰ Wonder is affectively-driven, and in that "drive," is accompanied by—that is, elicits—feelings and emotions, like joy and curiosity, sublimity, and even dread.¹¹¹ Wonder is not an emotion, but is accompanied by emotions.

This affect of wonder is part and parcel of what it is for the human to be being-in-the-world. Wonder, as affect, opens the human to the world. The "being-there" (i.e. the human) is ever open *to* the world and in wonder, opened *by* the world. *Dasein* experiences and acts out such openness through its faculties, both external (e.g. sight, hearing, etc.) and internal (e.g. memory, imagination, etc.).¹¹² Such openness—such *disponibilité*—is one of the intersecting lines in the axis of wonder. The other is the hyletic intensity of the object, to which we now turn.

¹⁰⁹ Voss-Roberts, *Tastes of the Divine*, 157 ff.

¹¹⁰ See p. 47 fn. 82 above for definitions of "feeling" and "emotion."

¹¹¹ Interestingly, in other languages (e.g. Spanish, German, Arabic, Korean), there are at least two words for "wonder," with usually at least one that captures the joyous, and at least one, the dreadful. Also, see: Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960).

¹¹² Much discussion of the "senses" and "faculties" in the Western philosophical tradition, since Aristotle, has attempted to make sense of external and internal senses, and of their relations to the body and soul. For example, medieval Muslim thinkers most notably drew on Aristotle's "psychology" on the faculties in *De anima* to develop their own understandings of the powers that make beings what they are. This included the move, as Ibn Sīnā, and his interlocutors take, to distinguish between external and internal senses or faculties or powers (*quwwa*), with the former involving the sense organs (eyes, ears, etc.), and the latter, the mind. Regarding the internal faculties, Ibn Sīnā delineates five: common sense, formative power, memory, estimation, and imagination. Others enumerate them differently. Another related debate in that period revolves around the relation between internal and external senses. Within medieval Islamic discourse, Aristotelian proclivities tend to bring the internal and external senses together in a causal way, since all knowledge begins with the senses; whereas Neoplatonist inclinations tend to keep separate or minimally connected the internal and external faculties, since liberation requires the shedding of the material to elevate the soul to the work of Forms. It takes the "intervention" of Ibn Sīnā to bring these two views into some synthesis, wherein external sense perception, through abstractive reason, progressively "strips" matter away from "sensible objects," leading to the cognitive apprehension of immaterial forms. A full and detailed description and analysis of this conversation between external and internal faculties is not necessary here. What is significant is that the term "sense" (or "faculty") is not restricted to *external* senses, thus including moments of wonder initiated or

3) *Wonder involves the exceeding sensation-hýle of the object that elicits wonder*

The other intersecting line in the axis of wonder is *the sensation-hýle of the object* (or field, i.e. relation of objects and/or of others that make up the event experienced) *that elicits wonder*. Since the “object” may be encountered by external and/or internal senses, the term also encapsulates not just physical objects (e.g. the romantic dinner with one’s lover), but also the “objects” of memories, imagination, and even reason (e.g. remembering sharing the meal with one’s lover). That is to say, memories that elicit wonder project images that exceed, in their vivacity, the usual contents of memory.

It is important that the sensation-*hýle* be named as the place of contact in the axis of wonder. This is not to eliminate the natural *hýle*, since, as has been stated above, the sensation-*hýle* is deeply embedded in the natural *hýle*; and the natural *hýle* is “constituted upon a deeper stratum of ‘sensation-hýle.’”¹¹³ Hence, when the subjective affect is gripped by sensation-*hýle*, the event includes the natural *hýle*.

Now, to be sure, since all intentional content includes this pre-intentional sensual layer, one can rightly ask what makes the event of wonder different from all other pre-reflection (and even post-reflective) encounters with the world. Let us remember that wonder is experienced at the pre-mental levels of human experiencing, when the subject is overwhelmed or gripped by an object or field that is intense enough to draw the attention of a subject not intentionally attending

rekindled by an “object” of memory, imagination and the like. [See: Perler Dominik, “Introduction,” in *The Faculties: A History*, ed. Dominik Perler, Oxford Philosophical Concepts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3-9; Taneli Kukkonen, “Faculties in Arabic Philosophy,” in *idem.*, 66ff.]

¹¹³ Luis Román Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” *Husserl Studies* 19, no. 3 (2003): 211; also see: Beyer, “Edmund Husserl,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/>.

to her surroundings (remember the alluring tomato). Sensation-*hýle* specifically accounts for the “pre-givenness” of the moment of initial impression that is “prior to objectivation.”¹¹⁴

The experience of wonder is precisely this, that is, an “object” (actual object, field, or moment) resisting objectification, whose initial impression endures. Marion speaks of a “saturated phenomenon” as a phenomenon that exceeds its horizon.¹¹⁵ One could say that wonder is “saturated” in this sense. Yet based on the route that the transcendental reduction has taken, here it would be more justifiable to say that in the experience of wonder, the object’s sensation-*hýle* *exceeds* the natural *hýle*, and endures even when the natural *hýle* is bracketed by the subject’s subsequent *epoché*. Wonder remains, even after the subject engages the object in an epochal act, so long as the that intense “primal impression”¹¹⁶ that precedes the act of intentionality remains intense through the act of intentionality. Conversely, wonder diminishes whenever sensation-*hýle* is eventually subsumed by the natural *hýle*. This leads to one last necessary discussion, namely, regarding the stages of wonder.

I posit, beyond Marion, that wonder indicates not, or not simply, saturated phenomena, but a saturated horizon. The “excess-within” is present and already-there as possibility in the lifeworld as a whole. My reason for say this is simple. There are no objects that automatically elicit wonder, nor are there human perceivers that are *always* gripped by wonder. *Sometimes*, an other elicits the wonder-filled gaze of one person but not another; sometimes, the same other elicits wonder in the person in one moment and not in another. Hence, the surest claim, then, would be to posit an “excess-with” within the entire of horizon of experience, not an automatic quality to all of the lifeworld but as a possibility within all of the lifeworld. One could contend

¹¹⁴ In Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 208, 209, 214.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “Sketch of the Saturated Phenomenon,” in *The Essential Writings*, ed. Kevin Hart, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 108 ff.

¹¹⁶ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 210.

that if this is thus, then this “excess-within” would eventually be the norm of experience. (“The fish are the last to discover water.”) But I would retort that the intensity of emotions that accompany wonder means that this excess-within is never normalized. (Fish do not discover water, but they can sense new currents therein.)

Revolving Around the Axis of Wonder (2): Stages of Wonder; Or, Enduring Wonder

Wonder is a particularly intense and enduring event between the pre-intentional, affectively-driven subject and the exceeding sensation-hýle of the object eliciting wonder.

Wonder is *the encounter between the “excess-with” of the other, that acts first, and the available openness of the self.* As an event, wonder may be fleeting or enduring. Its “lifespan” is determined by both poles in the event, by both intersecting lines in the axis. On one end, the openness or closure of the subject has some influence in nurturing or hindering the availability to wonder. Likewise, the sensation-*hýle* may either exceed or be subsumed by the natural *hýle*, also having an effect on the experience of wonder. While our focus thus far has been on the initial stage of wonder (since that initial impact carries with it the quality of wonder that is experienced throughout successive stages), some defining statements about the successive stages are warranted.

There are at least two stages in the experience of wonder, and possibly a third. The “disruption” of being grasped is the initial moment. Here, one wonders-*at*. In this initial wonder-at, a latent question is implied, which emerges prior to intellection and objectification. At this stage, *wonder precedes the question.*

Since a latent question is implied in this initial wondering-at, the second stage is one in which *wonder concedes the question* (concede as in “yielding to”), driving the subject’s quest toward deeper contact, engagement, and understanding. Wonder draws one to know; that is,

embedded in wonder is *a desire to know*. (Wonder-at becomes wonder-about. In this second moment, the being-grasped of wonder is accompanied by subject's attempt to grasp via the intentional act, by the subject consciously grasping toward understanding.

Two further clarifications should be made here. First, as an affect, wonder “does not specify any property of the object.”¹¹⁷ That is, it does not make any true determinations regarding the object eliciting wonder, yet it draws one to seek said determinations. As José Ortega y Gasset posits, “to be surprised, to wonder, is *to begin* to understand.”¹¹⁸ And second, in the cases in which wonder remains intense, that initial sense impression is co-present in an intense way with the act of intentionality.¹¹⁹ Yet—and this is vitally important—the experience of wonder remains beyond the gripping powers of intentionality. Acts of intentionality and intellection cannot out-grasp the grasping of wonder, when wonder is enduring. While the act of reduction and reflection correlate to either the nurture or erosion of the intensity of wonder, this is not a necessary or automatic correlation. One cannot call forth wonder or squelch it. Wonder just happens. In some cases, wonder endures during further reflection; in other cases, it dissipates.

Yet, there are moments—the third stage of wonder—where an “excess” remains, even after the transcendental reduction arrives at a fulfillment. As Sam Keen points out, wonder need not dissipate with the increased knowledge of the object or event eliciting wonder.¹²⁰ Knowledge at times fuels even great wonder and awe. Excess-within is, well, excessive, eluding any conceptual framework with which one tries to contain it. Truly, there are times when the initial

¹¹⁷ Bower, “Affectively Driven Perception,” 234.

¹¹⁸ Ortega y Gasset, *Revolt of the Masses*, 12. (Italics added for emphasis.)

¹¹⁹ Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), 117. Cf. Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, V § 14, p. 567.

¹²⁰ Sam Keen, *Apology for Wonder* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 33–35.

wonder-at persists, remains, and endures beyond the second wonder-about. That about which one wonders breaks down the very words that seek to contain it in descriptive reduction. The brackets break, for they cannot enclose the described. *Wonder exceeds the answer*. The subject remains gripped by wonder, unable to shake off its hold on one's open, available self. What began as an initial wonder-at, and endured through a wonder-about, is now a *wonder-in-awe*. This is the end-without-end of the temporal arc of wonder. The ontological tension remains, to quote Marcel again, an ontological *mystery*.

Conclusion

To summarize, we have now achieved an eidetic reduction of wonder: wonder is *a particularly intense and enduring event between the pre-intentional, affectively-driven subject and the exceeding sensation-hýle of the object eliciting wonder*. Wonder is *the encounter between the "excess-with" of the other, that acts first, and the available openness of the self*. In its three general stages, it evolves, so that it, at first, precedes the question (i.e. wonder-at), then it concedes the question (i.e. wonder-about), and lastly, in some cases, it exceeds the answer (wonder-in-awe).

An "ontological tension" is at the heart in the event of wonder. Wonder is an intense experience of a relational-qualitative differential.¹²¹ On the one hand, there is a nearing self-dissolution between the self being grasped by wonder and the other grasping wonder. One is "lost" in the event of wonder. On the other hand, one is deeply aware of or attuned to the other eliciting wonder, and through it, interestingly, one is deeply aware or attuned to oneself as the object of wonder's grasp. The other eliciting wonder is seen intensely and "in detail."

¹²¹ Making this connection is not farfetched when consider that Massumi's concept emerges from his work on art and aesthetics, a field of inquiry in which the experience of wonder is typical a constitutive element.

Co-occurring this vividness of the other is a vividness of oneself, through the other. While by deeply attuned to the other eliciting wonder, one is becoming attuned to oneself. One re-engages oneself in by being engaged “thaumatically” by the other. Therefore, the being-lost in wonder is never fully actualized, since at that point of deep identifying depth with the other, a qualitative depth, both of oneself and the other, co-emerges. At the point when one becomes *epistemologically* lost in the “perceived vastness” of the event, one *ontologically* finds oneself anew. There is both near self-diminishment and intense self-discovery in being grasped by wonder. One is both “lost and found”: lost in the “vastness” and intensity of the event and of the other that elicits wonder; and found in and through being elicited into a wonder-filled gaze of the other. *The experience of wonder is a dialectic between familiarity and dissimilarity, between “sympathetic” semblance and disruptive difference, of identity (as in ‘identify with’) and difference.*

Probing deeper into this ontological tension/mystery takes the inquiry beyond the epistemic reach of phenomenology. The ontological tension is revealed as an intimation of what by “stand under” wonder. The “structural” tension between “sympathetic” semblance and disruptive difference, between identity and difference, moves the inquiry into the realm of metaphysics.

There are three medieval metaphysicians who began their search for understanding from a different starting point than subjectivity and its (pre-)intentionality. They began their question on the question of objective reality—that is, on the question of being as such and not simply “my” being. Each tackled the concept on Being/being in ways that still affirmed the intensity, beauty, and vivacity of lived experience, an move that can make space for considering what indeed stands under wonder. It is this metaphysical endeavor which I undertake next.

CHAPTER 2

METAPHYSICS OF PARTICIPATION

AS THE ONTOLOGICAL GROUNDING FOR WONDER

The existence attributed to each created thing is the existence of the Reality, since the contingent does not possess being. However, the entities of contingents are receptacles for the manifestation of Being.
—Ibn ‘Arabī¹

Student: What is the cause that forces matter to be moved to receive form?

Teacher: The cause of this is the desire of matter to receive goodness and delight when it receives form. The same should be said about the motion of all substances, because the motion of all substances is toward the One and because of the One. The reason is that everything that exists desires to be moved and to obtain something of the goodness of the first being.

—Ibn Gabirol²

[J]ust as that which has fire, but is not itself fire, is on fire by participation; so that which has existence but is not existence, is a being by participation.

—Thomas Aquinas³

This chapter begins with a note on the shift from phenomenology to metaphysics and then on the comparative method deployed in this chapter. Next comes a brief definition and overview of the doctrine of participation in Plato and Plotinus, since their doctrines of participation are retrieved and repurposed by Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas. From this, I turn to a chronological reflection on each metaphysician’s doctrine of participation. Fourth, I offer some comparative notes, highlighting and substantiating the correspondences between the three ontologies discussed. Lastly, I propose a revised ontology of participation, one that draws from the best of metaphysical schema, with the goal being the construction of a metaphysic that

¹ In Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy, 236; cf. Ibn Al-‘Arabī, et.al., *The Meccan Revelations*, Vol. 2, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. Cyrille Chodkiewicz and Denis Gril (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 69.3-4.

² *The Font of Life (Fons vitae)*, trans. John A. Laumakis, *Mediæval Philosophical Texts in Translation*, No. 51 (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2014), 5.32.

³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.4.

can make sense of the experience of wonder as phenomenologically deduced in the previous chapter. On the basis of the ontological ground unearthed by the end of this chapter, the following chapter constructs a theological anthropology of wonder—a theo-thaumatic theology.

In Praise of Metaphysics

This chapter moves from the phenomenological to the metaphysical. The act of reduction can only take the investigation so far, since it does not draw metaphysical conclusions. The descriptively incisive phenomenological method is vital because of its ability to bracket and then hone in on wonder, as the previous chapter demonstrated. The phenomenology of wonder entails perceiving a mode of perceiving, of questioning a mode of questioning, of understanding a mode of understanding, seeing, etc.—in short, encountering our encounter with the world in wonder.

This chapter metaphysically grounds the *subjective experience* of wonder perception in some objective vision of reality. This ontological move is beyond phenomenology's capacity, for it tries to describe some reality that, phenomenologically speaking, transcends perceptual experience. This requires complementing phenomenological inquiry with metaphysical considerations, that we move from "the 'being-given' of phenomenology" to "the 'given-being' of metaphysics."⁴ This metaphysical turn takes the investigation to what "stands behind" (*substance*) wonder, that is to say, from the "being-given" of wonder to the "given-being" of wonder.

This move to metaphysics grounds the *fruits* of the *epoché* of the previous chapter. This grounding is formulated with a metaphysical approach that accepts the *fruits* of the phenomenological reduction but does not accept the epistemological *limits* set by phenomenological reduction as such. This metaphysical approach sees the phenomenological

⁴ P. Masterson, *Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 126–27.

features revealed in the previous chapter as “cyphers of transcendence.”⁵ Metaphysical inquiry allows one to go where phenomenology cannot, namely behind the phenomenon of wonder.

In a way, then, metaphysical inquiry opens a back door to the world of wonder, searching not for the experience of wonder, but a metaphysical and ontological grounding that makes such an experience possible. This move is necessary epistemologically since the *epoché* carried out in the last chapter raises a major question that phenomenology cannot answer. This question is metaphysical in nature, for it intimates some existential “structure” undergirding the type of experience that wonder is. This unanswered question from chapter 1 is: what metaphysical structure can make sense of the *ontological tension* between identity and difference in the relational-qualitative event of wonder?

Any demonstration or conclusion one makes regarding these this open question will go beyond what one can rightly call “phenomena,” and thus beyond phenomenology which, as a rule, tends to be non-metaphysical, if not anti-metaphysical.⁶ One could argue that these questions can be handled ontologically, which is within phenomenology’s purview, but this

⁵ Patrick Masterson argues that although the doctrine of creation and its embedded assertion of the asymmetrical relation between the world and God is a *theological* affirmation, there are “cyphers of transcendence” that point to this asymmetrical relationship “in our pre-philosophical lived experience.” See his *Sense of Creation: Experience and the God Beyond*, Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Series (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), i, 2.

⁶ For example, Jean-Paul Sartre famously declared that metaphysics raises questions that one cannot answer, and that phenomenology can speak to ontology but not metaphysics. Cf. Thomas Flynn, “Jean-Paul Sartre,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2013 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/sartre/>, accessed on April 19, 2017. As Flynn summarizes, “Like Husserl and Heidegger, Sartre distinguished ontology from metaphysics and favored the former. In his case, ontology is primarily descriptive and classificatory, whereas metaphysics purports to be causally explanatory, offering accounts about the ultimate origins and ends of individuals and of the universe as a whole. Unlike Heidegger, however, Sartre does not try to combat metaphysics as a deleterious undertaking. He simply notes in a Kantian manner that it raises questions we cannot answer.” (Flynn, “Jean-Paul Sartre,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/sartre/>) Likewise Jean-Luc Marion entire theological project is based on the assertion that metaphysics is “dead,” though this author believes his notion of “saturated phenomena” to be, ironically, an example of exemplary metaphysical inquiry. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “Sketch of the Saturated Phenomenon,” 108 ff.

chapter opts for the “openness” that a metaphysical analysis offers, in order to get at existence *qua* existence rather than the perspectivism and immanent consciousness of “my” existence and “our” existence.⁷

This open question arises out of a series of two prior findings from the *epoché* in the previous chapter one. One, a key feature of wonder that emerged was the observer’s “caught-ness” in something beyond herself. This led to the question of whether there is a metaphysical structure that supports this sense of being caught. To accept an objective “world” beneath this experience of being embedded into the “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*) prompts the question of whether this sense of “being caught” is sustained by an ontological structure? And two, in maintaining this dialectic, we uphold both Merleau-Ponty’s and Marcel’s conclusions 1) that because the body is in the world, and the world in the body, therefore enfleshment and emplacement inhere; but that 2) the body-subject is still distinct from the world “out there.”⁸ Hence, the world of experience is a dialectic between “sympathetic” identity and “othering” difference. This suggests that this structural tension is part of the “substance” of wonder; that *wonder occurs in the “place” between identity and difference*. This suggestion falls beyond the purview of phenomenology, and instead requires metaphysical contemplation.

⁷ As Toshihiko Izutsu rightly points out on the one hand, the “existentialism” of the classical Islamic traditions of the East (i.e. Persia) and that of the European Continental tradition each start their inquiry on existence from different places. *Wujūd*, (i.e. absolute or general existence, or existence *per se*) of the “Iranian existentialists” like Ibn Sīnā and his readers (as Izutsu dubs them) should not be confused with the “my existence” and “your existence” of the Continental tradition of Europe like Sartre’s being “in-itself” (*en-soi*) and “for-itself” (*pour-soi*). The latter contends that the former is “quite colorless, bleak and chilly.” Yet this is not so when considering rightly what is meant by *wujūd*. Nevertheless, on the other hand, Izutsu posits more similitude between the two than meets the eye, particularly “in their most basic structure,” namely, they “both go back to one and the same root experience... of existence,” what is called in Islam, *aṣālat al-wujūd* (“fundamental reality of existence”). Hence, the “awareness of existence... constitutes the starting point of modern existentialism” and for the Iranian philosophers of *wujūd*. In fact, Izutsu contends that Heidegger’s “unprecedented” and “revolutionary break” with Aristotelian ontology is neither revolution nor unprecedented; rather, it began with the “philosopher of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* school.” See: Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 43-44, 46-47.

⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xi, 94.

This chapter hypothesizes that the doctrine of participation, used first by Plato and subsequently by many late ancient and medieval thinkers, can give a metaphysical response to this phenomenological conundrum. This essay in the history of comparative theology and philosophy explores the respective doctrines of participation of three Abrahamic metaphysicians of being: Shlomo Ben Yehuda Ibn Gabirol, Muhyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, and Tommaso d’Aquino (better known as Thomas Aquinas). Each of these metaphysicians develops a doctrine of participation as a key feature of their ontology. For Ibn Gabirol, all of creation participates in foundational matter (*yesōd*) just “outside” of God that is the substratum of existence. For Ibn ‘Arabī, creation participates in the *wujūd* (“being and finding”/“knowing”), in which presence and knowledge coincide. And for Aquinas, all reality (besides God who is subsisting Being itself) participates in this Being for its existence. This chapter reviews each of these doctrines in turn, for now focusing on the exegetical query of the competing doctrines of participation, and later offering a constructive analysis to formulate a metaphysical structure that makes sense of the experience of wonder.

Comparative Method: Beyond Particularity and Universality

The enterprise of comparative metaphysics/theology has been accused of “syncretism,” “(mis-)appropriation” of another’s beliefs and experiences, and “bias.” These accusations are not without reason. The distortion of others’ beliefs—by either essentializing, caricaturing, or even worse, demonizing them—has occurred since the first wave of twentieth-century Christian pluralists appeared.⁹ The problem is not a new one, as is evident from Aquinas’s

⁹ Cf. Gavin D’Costa argues that John Hick’s theory that all religions lead to the same ultimate reality would require redefining other religions’ ultimate claims, in *John Hick’s Theology of Religions: A Critical Evaluation* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987). Jahanmehr Mahdi and Abbas Yazdani contend with both pluralist and exclusivist assertions on moral and epistemological grounds, in “Hick’s Religious Pluralism and Plantinga’s Exclusivism in a Comparative Encounter,” *Comparative Theology* 1, no. 10 (2013): 71-82. Anselm K.

misunderstanding of both Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd—though most of his mishandling arose from the transmission and (mis)translation of texts from the Arabic to the Latin.¹⁰

Despite such criticism, any honest historical look at the development of doctrine or jurisprudence shows that confessional faith has deployed, loosely speaking, some form of comparative theology/philosophy, meaning it has drawn from the other confessional sources to develop creeds, *halakha*, and *sharia*. Jewish and Islamic law frequently borrowed from each other both content and method, especially in places like medieval Baghdad and Andalusia.¹¹ The Neoplatonic theology of the “One,” from thinkers like Plotinus and Proclus, served as a metaphysical idea for philosophers from all three Abrahamic faiths.¹² All theology and jurisprudence is in some sense comparative.

With this in mind, what are the purposes and goals of comparative theology/philosophy? This is a methodological question. As Anselm K. Min delineates, while there are multiple grounding presuppositions in the many theologies of pluralism articulated today in contemporary

Min posits that “religious pluralism” as a “neutral” theology ultimately undermines itself, in *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology After Postmodernism* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 180 ff.

¹⁰ Toshihiko Izutsu contends that Ibn Sīnā has been misread by Christian scholastics, including Aquinas, in his *The Concept and Reality of Existence* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2007), 4 ff. Sarah Pessin demonstrates the ways that Christian (and specifically, Augustinian) appropriation of Ibn Gabirol misconstrued the latter’s overall philosophical project and mystical/ethical goals. See: Sarah Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire: Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1 ff., 59 ff. Paul F. Knitter highlights the inescapable “bias” that enters the comparative task in his *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 216 ff. Also see: Jim Al-Khalili, *The House of Wisdom: How Arabic Science Saved Ancient Knowledge and Gave Us the Renaissance* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

¹¹ Cf. Jacob Neusner and Tamara Sonn, *Comparing Religions through Law: Judaism and Islam* (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹² Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works and Influence*, Great Islamic Thinkers (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002); idem., *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 1-38; Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 13-32; Aaron W. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 146-84; Julius Guttmann, “Neoplatonism,” in *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 84-133.

Christian theology,¹³ there are, generally speaking, two goals that comparative theologies fall into: one universalist and one particularist.¹⁴ Some scholars deploy a comparative approach to construct a so-called “universal” or at least shared theology or metaphysics *across* the traditions being engaged comparatively. Two distinctive Christian examples are those of David Burrell’s deployment of the doctrine of creation to construct an “Abrahamic theology”¹⁵ and Whiteheadian theory of “multiple ultimate realities,”¹⁶ which is similar to what Min calls “ontological” pluralism.¹⁷ The former arrives at a “shared” theology among the three Abrahamic religions; the latter suggests a philosophical theology that grounds “ontological” pluralism so as to affirm the ultimate realities. Perennialism likewise claims to be a comparative philosophy (or better, mysticism) that cuts across religions and that establishes a measure of “transcendental unity” by moving from the difference of exoteric ritual to the similitude of the esoteric mystical encounter.¹⁸

Obviously, this approach is not without shortcomings. For example, one may ignore vital differences in seeking to make a case for similitude—in short, mistaking semblance for

¹³ Anselm K. Min, *Paths to the Triune God: An Encounter between Aquinas and Recent Theologies* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 53; cf. idem., *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology After Postmodernism* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 156-197; cf. idem., “Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others: Towards a New Paradigm,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65.3 (Fall 1997): 587-588.

¹⁴ Anselm K. Min, conversation, May 1, 2017.

¹⁵ David B. Burrell, *Towards a Jewish-Christian-Muslim Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); idem., *Freedom and Creation in the Abrahamic Traditions*, Occasional Papers Series (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1995).

¹⁶ E.g. David Ray Griffin, “John Cobb’s Whiteheadian Complementary Pluralism,” in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 39-66. The theory of “multiple ultimate realities” extends beyond Christianity, though it is not adopting uncritically. E.g. Jeffery D. Long, “Ultimate Complexity: A Hindu Process Theology,” in *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, ed. Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 357-366; cf. idem., “Anekanta Vedanta: Toward a Deep Hindu Religious Pluralism,” in *Deep Religious Pluralism*, 130-157.

¹⁷ Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 53; cf. idem., *The Solidarity of Others*, 169-171; cf. idem., “Dialectical Pluralism and Solidarity of Others: Towards a New Paradigm,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65.3 (Fall 1997): 587-588.

¹⁸ Cf. Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, A Quest Book (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984).

sameness. The perennialist Frithjof Schuon errs in this way. He nuances his notion of “transcendental unity” by distinguishing the exoteric and esoteric, and by further claiming that the latter is in part tied to the former and in part independent from it (what he calls “quintessential esoterism”).¹⁹ Yet he ignores the significant contradiction that arise, for example, between an impersonal, ahistorical ultimate reality and an personal (however conceived) ultimate reality that acts in history. Sometimes, the difference is even more basic, like what one means by “religion.”²⁰

Others use the comparative theological method, but from and for their confessional particularity. That is to say, they seek to understand and construe their own faith but recognize that there is wisdom “from another quarter”²¹ that can shed light on one’s own theological commitments. Such a method allows comparison, not to construct a theological idea or jurisprudential ruling (*fatwā*) that expands across traditions, but to delve more deeply into one’s own particular confessional theology. The “Philosopher of the Arabs” al-Kindī (c. 801–873 CE) exemplifies this approach. In his *On First Philosophy*, he advises his fellow Muslim scholars “not [to] be ashamed to recognize truth and assimilate it, from whatever quarter it may reach us, even though it may come from earlier generations and foreign peoples.” He adds, “For the seeker after truth there is nothing of more value than truth itself; it never cheapens or debases the

¹⁹ Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, 7–60; cf. idem., *From the Divine to the Human: Survey of Metaphysics and Epistemology*, The Library of Traditional Wisdom (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1982).

²⁰ Anslem K. Min asserts, “Speaking of religious pluralism truly pluralistically, then, involves the caution of not defining religious pluralism in such a way as to imply a particular view of what a religion should be. Any definition of religious pluralism that attributes a particular “content” to religion and thereby defines the “essence” of all religions, contradicts its declared intention to allow all religions to exist in their diversity and to define themselves. It would be monism in the guise of pluralism.” In *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology After Postmodernism* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 180.

²¹ Cf. Esther 4:14.

seeker, but ennobles and elevates him.”²² Another thematic example in contemporary Christian theology is the deepening of a theology of the Cross by exploring Buddhist notions of emptiness and detachment.²³

Like the first type of comparative theology, making comparisons with this confessional intent is not without its dangers. For example, one can misrepresent the other because one has already decided what one “needs” from the other in order to justify or *further* justify what one has already affirmed. For example, Christian readings that sublate the Islamic ‘Īsā Ibn Maryam into the Christ of the Creeds tend to see Islam as a distorted Christianity,²⁴ just like Christian readings of the Old Testament/Tanakh misrepresent Rabbinic Judaism (which developed separately from Christian dogmatic developments) into partial, unfulfilled Christianity.²⁵ The major issue here is the task of comparative theology, which, instead of being transformative, is reduced to a kind of “proof texting” from without. This chapter (cautiously) practices this second confessional mode of comparative theology.

²² In Jim Al-Khalili, *The House of Wisdom*, 132. Another contemporary Christian example is Michelle Voss-Roberts, who speaks of “faithful” comparison with other religions for the sake of Christian systematic theology. See her edited anthology, *Comparing Faithfully: Insights for Systematic Theological Reflection*, Comparative Theology: Thinking Across Traditions (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016).

²³ Cf. John B. Cobb, Christopher Ives, and Masao Abe, *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*. Faith Meets Faith Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990); John B. Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); idem., *Beyond Comparison: Religious Pluralism and Religious Truth, Amida Buddha and Christ, Pure Land and the Kingdom of God*. Shinran’s Thought and the Contemporary World, 3 (Kyoto: Bukkyo Bunka Kenkyujo, Ryukoku University, 1997); D. T. Suzuki, “Crucifixion and Enlightenment,” in *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, World Perspectives, vol. 12 (New York: Harper, 1957), 145-156; Roger Corless and Paul F Knitter, eds. *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity: Essays and Explorations* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

²⁴ The first textual case of this Christocentric distortion of Islam is with the polemics of John of Damascus, especially his “Heresy of the Ishmaelites.” In John, Of Damascus, “On the Heresies,” in *Writings*, ed. Frederic H. Chase, The Fathers of the Church, a New Translation, vol. 37 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 153-160. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: The “Heresy of the Ishmaelites”* (Leiden: Brill, 1972); Daniel Janosik, *John of Damascus, First Apologist to the Muslims: The Trinity and Christian Apologetics in the Early Islamic Period* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

²⁵ Jacob Neusner deconstructs this Christian tendency in his *The Way of Torah: An Introduction to Judaism*, 7th ed., The Religious Life in History Series (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2004), 28–36.

Before moving on, note that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive. There is not an impenetrable wall between them, but overlap and fluidity. Yet, the end chosen will dictate the manner in which the comparative work is carried out. The comparative task of this chapter is the latter of these two approaches, yet with some nuance, for it does potentially affirm some “shared” theology (i.e. the first approach) between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that may foster the kind of “mutual solidarity” needed today, one that maintains both “differentiation and interdependence.”²⁶

This chapter therefore uses the second comparative method that arises from and returns to the confessional particularity of the Christian faith. As a whole, the dissertation is an intentionally *Christian* theology of wonder that, to quote al-Kindī again, is not “ashamed to recognize truth and assimilate it, from whatever quarter it may reach us.” Yet the particularity of the Christian faith shares some aspects with the respective particularities of Islam and Judaism. That is, all three faiths share “sufficient similarity,”²⁷ albeit with significant differences that must not be glossed over. Hence, an Abrahamic “common word”²⁸ is not only possible but significant, when one reviews their shared philosophical commitments (like divine unity) and shared revelatory history (like Abraham/ʾIbrāhīm, Moshe/Moses/Mūsā, and David/Dāwūd). Since their respective theological and legal developments are grounded in “the prophets of Israel

²⁶ Anselm K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 1.

²⁷ Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 89.

²⁸ “A Common Word between Us and You” is a 2007 open letter written by Islamic leaders to Christian leaders. It was written in response to comments regarding Islam during a lecture delivered by Pope Benedict XVI at the University of Regensburg on September 12, 2006. The title of the letter comes from the Qurʾān: “Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).” (*Aal ʾImran* 3:64) The author argues that the spirit of this call is also found in the Pauline charge, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” (Philippians 4:10)

and the philosophers of Greece,”²⁹ there is shared confessional material across the three, such as God as creator of all, as both just and merciful, and as revealed through prophecy. Thus, this comparative study attempts to arrive at a series of *Christian* conclusions, and yet it recognizes that such conclusions may have confessional semblances or affinities with those emerging from Jewish and Islamic reflection.

In a sense, this project seeks to emulate in some way the dialogical theologies of Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas, for each of whom a universal appraisal of the whole emerges for the particularity of revealed faith. In other words, they each recognized that there is a “dialectical pluralist”³⁰ option between particularism and universalism in such a comparative and pluralistic endeavor. Aaron Hughes’ work on specifically Jewish philosophy elucidates the universal-particular dialectical nature of a comparative-yet-confessional reflection, namely that “knowledge” is located “‘in-between’ particularism and universalism,” and that it is in the very essence of all three faiths to move between its “centripetal and centrifugal forces.”³¹

Why the Doctrine of Participation in Light of the Question of Wonder?

One could ask: Why this focus on participation and not some other concepts common to all three thinkers, since they do in fact share other key ontological concepts based on Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic ideas. To quote Özgür Koca, they do indeed “drink from the same water,”³² and so their ideas show considerable overlap. Ibn Gabirol and Ibn ‘Arabī were working from the Arabic; Aquinas, from Latin. Aquinas and Ibn ‘Arabī were working from the

²⁹ Carl W. Ernst, *Following Muhammad: Rethinking Islam in the Contemporary World*, Islamic Civilization & Muslim Networks (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 6.

³⁰ Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 174 ff.

³¹ Aaron W. Hughes, *Rethinking Jewish Philosophy: Beyond Particularism and Universalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), xv, 32. According to Hughes, two Jewish archetypes at each pole are the particularist Yehuda Halevi and the universalist Maimonides. (32) Muslim and Christian counterparts can be named as well.

³² Özgür Koca, conversation, December 12, 2016.

Avicennian priority to existence. Ibn Gabirol preceded Avicenna and thus worked from the Arabic Neoplatonic essentialism of his time, which he revised with Pseudo Empedoclean materialism.³³ Yet, despite this major difference, all three centrally engage the doctrine of participation.

This dissertation is ultimately concerned with a theological treatment of wonder, meaning that its intent is to construct not simply an anthropology of wonder, but a *theological* anthropology of wonder. And as Ibn Gabirol, Aquinas and Ibn ‘Arabī would all concur, what makes the object of study “theological” is its relation to God.³⁴ As Aquinas exclaimed, “*sub ratione Dei.*”³⁵ They use the doctrine of participation to demonstrate the cosmos’ relation to, and total dependence on, God, as the “fountain of life” (*fons vitae*). It is the linchpin in their metaphysics of being and in their theological/kalamic confession of the cosmos as *created*. What this philosophical principle of participation offers theology is a structural “map”³⁶ for plotting the world’s relation to God while preserving God’s radical difference to the world, a map for “deducing”³⁷ the relational implications for that creational picture. In other words, participation acts as the metaphysical structure for each thinker’s doctrine of creation (and, consequently, for their doctrine of God as transcendent creator), and thus serves as the point of contact for the comparative-constructive task of this chapter.

³³ For understanding “Neoplatonism,” Pessin opts for Plotinus as the centering device, and looks at concepts of God and the cosmos’ relation to God. Through this lens, Ibn Gabirol is solidly Neoplatonist. A nuance is needed though, since Ibn Gabirol was shaped not by the *Greek* Neoplatonist corpus but by its *Arabic* counterpart, which underwent critical changes in translation. Therefore, in term of the history of philosophy, it is not be wrong to categorize him as an *Arabic* Neoplatonist. See: Pessin, “Jewish Neoplatonism: Being above Being and Divine Emanation in Solomon Ibn Gabirol and Isaac Israeli,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 91-93.

³⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Meccan Revelations*, Vol 2, 69.3-4; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.1.7; Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.32.

³⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.1.7.

³⁶ Cf. Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 147.

³⁷ According to Aquinas, “deduction” is one of the ways that philosophy serves theology (*Summa Theologica*, I.1.1).

Related to this, the doctrine of participation in all three not only explicates creation's relation to God, it also substantiates *the relation between things*. For all three, the doctrine of participation is the ontological grounding for the unity, mutuality, and relationality between all created persons and things. In the previous chapter's phenomenological study, its preliminary conclusions and inconclusive answers highlight that wonder as an event is situated the "place" between the perceived and the perceiver; that wonder arises *between the pre-intentional, affectively-driven subject and the exceeding sensation-hýle of the object eliciting wonder*; and that this wonder is placed in a relational in-between, gripping the subject from without yet viscerally sensed within. That chapter also suggested that the event of wonder is dialectically sustained within the *ontological tension* between *identity* and *difference* found within relating things. Participation seems to provide a framing for this tension, by both ontologically grounding each particular entity (including humans) and also the relational matrix in which each particular entity participates with all other entities. That is, it grounds all things as a sum (particularity) and as a whole (universality). As Aquinas notes, affirming God as *Creator*, which is explicated metaphysically with the doctrine of participation, means that divine providence is not just universally *over* the *whole* of creation, but also intimately *with* each created thing, receiving life directly and in an *unmediated* way from God. Aquinas writes: "Everything falls under divine providence, not merely in its universality but in its particularity."³⁸ Therefore, with such in-between-ness to wonder, the doctrine of participation provides the metaphysical platform upon which the essence of wonder can rest.

³⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.22.2. This could be a polemical statement aimed at the Muslim thinkers that attest that God does not know particulars.

Working Definition of Participation: Plato and Plotinus

This section articulates a common definition of participation, one shared by all three thinkers, before it then delves into each thinker's way of utilizing the doctrine. Of course, each philosopher appropriates the term "participation" (and others) from an inherited lexicon, and each does so in his unique way, adapting and reshaping sources to suit his larger ontological outlook. Their differences (be they subtle or drastic) are noted later in the individual discussions. Noting the differences between each vision of reality is crucial to appreciate the particular contribution of each thinker to metaphysics. The differences will not be ignored for the sake of some tension-free (yet false) vision of the perfect ontological harmony between these three masters. To do so would yield sloppy comparative theological work. At the same time, it is clear that scholarship in the medieval intellectual world in Andalusia drew upon common Neoplatonic and Aristotelian ideas circulating among and between the Abrahamic faiths. Hence, there is common "raw material" shared between the three traditions.

What is the concept of participation from which Ibn Gabirol, Ibn 'Arabī, and Aquinas draw in their respective metaphysics? Participation is typically defined as "the general notion that lower strata of being *depend* on higher principles in the way that these same lower levels are *constituted* by some kind of participation in these higher principles."³⁹ There are two sets of opposites at play in this definition: that of self-sufficiency and dependency, and that of perfection and privation. Thus, participation works from an understanding that constituted things are dependent on something else (i.e. a "higher principle"), without which it cannot be (existence) or cannot be what it is (essence). The second set of opposites, related to the first, speaks to this dependency in a nuanced way by proposing that the dependency of the "lower strata" on the

³⁹ Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, *Activity and Participation in Late Antique and Early Christian Thought*, The Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1. [Italics added for emphasis]

“higher” strata is due to a lack or privation of the lower strata and therefore cannot constitute itself as being (existence) or as the thing that it is (essence). In short, a thing does not possess that perfection or power on its own.

With regards to both self-sufficiency/dependency and perfection/privation, the “higher principle” is both its simplest instantiation of that principle, of which things participate in a composited way, and the undivided fullness of that principle, of which things participate only in part. In his *Elements of Theology*, Proclus posits that “every power which is *more single*, is more infinite than that which is multiplied.”⁴⁰ Undivided power means undiminished power, according to the classical conception of the *simple* One. Hence, that in which things participate is always an undivided, full reality.

Important to note is the *necessity* of the concept of participation for existing things. Participation speaks to the *constitution* of a thing, either to its thing-ness (essence or quiddity) or to its is-ness (existence or act-of-being). Neither essentialist nor existentialist programs use the doctrine of participation in an accidental or unnecessary way. One can offer up the crude example of a car. A car is still a car without a radio or air conditioning. But a car cannot be a car without an engine or wheels of some sort. Analogously, participation is a *constitutive* element of a thing, rather than an accidental feature of that thing. That in which a thing participates is not simply an “add-on” or “luxury” feature that is otherwise unnecessary for the

⁴⁰ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, trans. Thomas Taylor (Dorset, UK: The Prometheus Trust, 1994), prop. 95. (Italics added for emphasis.). Cf. Eleonore Stump, “Simplicity,” in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Philip L. Quinn & Charles Taliaferro (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 250-256; Cf. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, V.3.14, VI.8; VI.9.3; cf. Lloyd Gerson, Lloyd, “Plotinus,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/plotinus/>, accessed on June 1, 2018.

thing to be or for the thing to be what it is. Instead, participation *actualizes* the thing that is, constituting its essence or its existence.

Another way to say this is in terms of necessary and contingent being.⁴¹ Every created thing is contingent, either in its thing-ness or its is-ness; therefore it must participate in something that is *necessary*. The higher principle, in which contingent existents participate, is a necessary and not a contingent reality. That in which a thing participates, since it is necessary, holds “primacy”⁴² or “principality”⁴³ within the wider ontological structure of reality.

To summarize: participation is the concept that lower strata of beings, as composite and contingent beings, depend on higher principles, which are simple, undivided, and necessary, in the way that these same lower beings are necessarily constituted by some kind of participation in these higher principles. This is the working definition of Ibn Gabirol’s, Ibn ‘Arabī’s, and Aquinas’s respective doctrines of participation. Regardless of the nuances and subtle changes between the three, they share this common working definition.

We now turn more directly to our three thinkers. Yet because this chapter is a focused look at the participatory features of each within each one’s metaphysics of being, it does not cover all aspects of each thinker’s thought. Essential for our discussion here is how each deploys the doctrine of participation, and why that matters for understanding reality generally and wonder specifically. This, and this alone, is the centering device for this metaphysical; this prevents it from spiraling out of control. These sketches of each thinker’s use of the doctrine of

⁴¹ Ibn Sīnā’s monumental work “necessary existent” and “contingent existent” profoundly shaped subsequent Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Thought, including both Ibn ‘Arabī and Aquinas. Cf. Peter Adamson, “From the Necessary Existent to God,” in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 170–89; Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci, ed., *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna’s “Metaphysics”*, Scientia Graeco-Arabica, Bk. 7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

⁴² Rudi A. Te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Studien Und Texte Zur Geistesgeschichte Des Mittelalters, Bd. 46 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995), 72.

⁴³ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 154.

participation will be incisive and concise, focusing solely on the doctrine of participation and any tangential metaphysical features necessary for this discussion.

Participation in Ibn Gabirol: Matter Matters

Synopsis

This section demonstrates that Ibn Gabirol's doctrine participation posits that the "higher principle" in which things participate is not "pure matter" or "universal matter," but is better translated as "Grounding Element" (Heb. *yesōd*) as Pessin argues (discussed below).⁴⁴ This Grounding Element is the *existential* principle of Ibn Gabirol's ontology since "universal matter ['grounding element'] sustains, and universal form is sustained."⁴⁵ The existence and "presence" of an entity is due to its participation in *yesōd* and not in forms or ideas.

Regarding the role that participation plays in his doctrine of creation, Ibn Gabirol posits that *yesōd* comes directly from the *Essence* of God, whereas universal form is held by and proceeds from the Divine *Mind*.⁴⁶ The divine attribute assigned to *yesōd* is desire. Ibn Gabirol posits an analogy between matter's desire for form and creatures' desire for their Source.⁴⁷ As Pessin puts it, "Matter's own key role is described in terms of desire..., and given that it is present in all things, matter in this way introduces desire into all existents."⁴⁸ She concludes, "Where God reveals himself as the 'Fountain of Life,' our material core acts as the river through which we may return always to our source."⁴⁹ Reading Ibn Gabirol with Pessin, created things (including humans) exist by participating in matter; and this matter introduces a desire for being,

⁴⁴ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 1, 2, 23.

⁴⁵ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 38.

⁴⁶ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 8.

⁴⁷ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 17; cf. Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.32.

⁴⁸ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 42-3.

⁴⁹ Pessin, "Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicebron]," <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-gabirol/>.

for good, and for God as the core of existence. This ontology of desire is key to grounding wonder metaphysically.

Ibn Gabirol is not as coherent as the other thinkers discussed here, and therefore difficult to understand, let alone to systematize. He allows for discord, dissonance, and discontinuities of thought within his own schema. As Julius Guttman posits, Ibn Gabirol is a “dialectical thinker” who “wrestles with the [competing] concepts” more often than “overcoming” them.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, there are some features that generally remain relatively steady throughout his metaphysical vision. Principally, there is a “thoroughgoing consistency with which he constructs his system on the basis of his specific interpretation of the concepts of matter and form.”⁵¹ This section first identifies the “higher” and “lower” principles involved in his doctrine of participation. Then, taking a step back and based on traditional Gabirolian scholarship, it briefly discusses the main features of Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysics that relate to the role of participation. Subsequently it explores Sarah Pessin’s reinterpretation, for she has written the only full-volume treatment of Ibn Gabirol’s metaphysics to date.⁵² In her radical re-reading, she de-Christianizes and de-Augustinianizes *traditional* understandings of the Jewish philosopher and poet, revealing instead a unique thinker who, in bringing together Neoplatonic essentialism and Pseudo-Empedoclean materialism, intentionally deviates from “business as usual” to raise matter *qua* matter as the “Grounding Element” that *desires to be*.⁵³ Opting for Pessin’s proposal, the section then explores how matter and desire are tied, and how this relation between matter and desire may ground wonder as defined in chapter 1. It begins with the

⁵⁰ Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 90.

⁵¹ Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 91.

⁵² Raphael Loewe’s book-length text on Ibn Gabirol is mainly biographical and focuses on Gabirol as poet. Cf. Raphael Loewe, *Ibn Gabirol*, Jewish Thinkers (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990).

⁵³ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 1-2, 6; cf. idem., “Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicbron],” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ibn-gabirol/>, accessed June 23, 2018.

traditional interpretation of Ibn Gabirol before articulating Pessin's much more compelling rendition of the same.

Traditional Readings of Ibn Gabirol: Universal Hylomorphism and Divine Will

In the history of Gabirolian studies, the three key features of Ibn Gabirol's metaphysics are: emanationism, Divine Will, and universal hylomorphism.⁵⁴ Framed by these three ideas, Ibn Gabirol asserts that all created things emanate from the One, but that they do so by Divine Will and not of necessity. Through emanation, all created things *participate* in “prime [or ‘universal’] matter” *and* “universal form.” What this means is that there are ascending strata of matter that make up the ladder of being, and that on the created side of things that these culminate in prime/universal matter and universal form.⁵⁵

For Ibn Gabirol then, the distinction between all created beings and God (“the One” in *Fons Vitae*) as Creator is that the former are all hylomorphic beings, i.e. composite beings, whereas God—and only God—is simple being. As hylomorphic substances, they participate in prime matter and universal form. This includes simple spiritual substances, which is atypical in the Neoplatonic schema. Simple or spiritual substances are *spiritual* matter plus form, whereas composite, corporeal substances are *corporeal* matter plus form. This *spiritual* matter is found in the higher stratum of the ladder of being, meaning that there are different levels of matter, from Universal or Prime Matter down to elemental matter (i.e. the four elements).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Emanationism is “the philosophical expression of creation,” meaning, creation “emanates” in its totality from God. Cf. Carmela Baffioni, “Ikhwān al-Safā’,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2016 Edition), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2016/entries/ikhwan-al-safa/>, accessed Dec. 28, 2018. “Hylomorphism” is a compound word made up of the Greek words for “matter” (*hylē*) and “form” (*morphē*). “Hylomorphic” beings are composed of matter and form.

⁵⁵ Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), 227-28. Cf. Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 13–15.

⁵⁶ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Age*, 227; T. M. Rudavsky, “Medieval Jewish Neoplatonism,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, Routledge History of World Philosophies, Vol. II (London, Routledge, 2003), 158.

Yet there is an added element to Ibn Gabirol's hylomorphic understanding of all created things. Progressing up the ladder of being, each stratum becomes more encompassing and inclusive. For example, the movement upward begins with the individual thing, then species of that thing, then its genus, then all natural things, and so forth. And, each stratum in itself is composed of matter and form: the thing, its species, its genus, and so forth, are each composed of matter and form. This ever-expanding movement upwards culminates with the whole *created* order as a whole, which is also composed of universal matter and universal form. That is, the whole of the cosmos, and not merely the sum of things in the cosmos, is hylomorphic, participating in universal matter and universal form.⁵⁷ Note what is happening here: not only are things individually hylomorphic, but their ever-expanding relations are also composed of matter and form.

The conventional Neoplatonist would do two things with the doctrine of participation that Ibn Gabirol does not do. First, participation in these conventional cosmologies would apply principally to form. (Later, Ibn 'Arabī and Aquinas apply it to existence itself, see below.) The doctrine of participation would therefore lift up “Ideas” or “Forms” that are the fullness or perfection of essences and then say that a given thing *participates partially* in its corresponding manner.⁵⁸ Yet, in traditional readings, Ibn Gabirol names form *and* matter as the highest principle in his doctrine of participation. This is significant for, as Philip Clayton notes, much of the history of philosophy has not known what exactly to do with matter as such, “as if matter continually recedes from our grasp.”⁵⁹ At most, philosophical history on the subject is about

⁵⁷ Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 92, 95.

⁵⁸ Cf. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 1–4.

⁵⁹ Philip Clayton, “Unsolved Dilemmas: The Concept of Matter in the History of Philosophy and in Contemporary Physics,” in *Information and the Nature of Reality: From Physics to Metaphysics*, ed. Paul Davies and Niels Henrik Gregersen (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 50.

what matter *is not*.⁶⁰ Second, the partial instantiation of the Form of the given thing would be deemed a “privation,” and the source of that privation would be matter. Matter of the given thing would limit the Form’s individuation or instantiation in that thing.

Rather than accept these conventional moves, Ibn Gabirol revises them. First, instead of only participating in a perfect Form, he says that the given thing participates in prime matter as well. The given thing is constituted by participating in *both matter and form*, what traditional Gabirolian scholarship has dubbed “universal hylomorphism.” Created beings are hylomorphic by participation. Second, instead of seeing matter as the passive privation of form, Ibn Gabirol instead proposes a mutuality between form and matter, since “in their creation, universal matter and universal form are united simultaneously.”⁶¹ In fact, much traditional scholarship asserts that for Gabirol, form and matter are mutually defined and mutually dependent.⁶²

As Guttman highlight, this (re-)valuing of matter makes Ibn Gabirol unique among the Neoplatonists. Because the matter-and-form composition is consistent throughout the whole emanation, one need not denigrate the lowest levels of existence, or deem them as *materially* “evil” or “without value.”⁶³ Guttman argues that for this reason, the opposition between sensory and supra sensory worlds is not an absolute one in Ibn Gabirol’s ontology since the same primary matter is “present” in the spiritual world as well as the sensory world. Guttman concludes, “The material world can no longer be placed in absolute opposition to the world of

⁶⁰ Clayton, “Unsolved Dilemmas,” 50.

⁶¹ John A. Laumakis, “Introduction”, in Ibn Gabirol, Solomon (Avicbron), *The Font of Life (Fons Vitae)*, trans. and intro. John A. Laumakis, *Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation*, No. 51 (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2014), 40.

⁶² Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 95.

⁶³ Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 94.

spirit, as there is no principle upon which such an opposition could be based.”⁶⁴ Instead, matter is given the designation of *genus generalissimum* (“the highest genus”).⁶⁵

Pessin’s Proposal: Matter’s Desire-to-Be and ‘Desire at the Core of Being’

Despite the centuries-long interpretive consensus among Ibn Gabirol’s readers, Pessin asserts the need for a reimagining of the philosopher-poet’s ontological vision. The stated goal of *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire* is to hear anew this “vibrant voice,” which has been mutedly overlaid with Augustinian and Kabbalistic readings, or distorted by Aristotelian and Thomistic criticisms. The criticisms especially have led to a “scholastic” reduction of Ibn Gabirol into what Pessin sees as “two rather narrow ideas,” namely the doctrines of “universal hylomorphism” and “divine will.”⁶⁶ She argues instead for “reading Ibn Gabirol in terms of a Theology of Desire, which apophatically envisions God’s entry into the world of being in terms of a Divine Desire that gives rise, first and foremost, to desire at the core of being.” And this God-given desire-to-be is made manifest by “a principle of pure matter that permeates the entirety of existence.”⁶⁷ Instead of “prime matter,” she suggests new nomenclature for this “pure matter”—the “Grounding Element” (Heb. *yesōd*)—language she settles upon by tracing and lifting up Pseudo-Empedoclean materialist influences in Ibn Gabirol.⁶⁸

From Matter and Form to “Grounding Element Desiring Form”

The uniqueness of Ibn Gabirol is lost when one accepts the Latin *materia et forma* for Ibn Gabirol’s Arabic phrase, *al-‘unṣur waṣ-ṣūra*. Certainly, *aṣ-ṣūra* can be translated as “form.” Yet, *al-‘unṣur* is not the most prevalent term used for “matter” in the Arabic literature of the

⁶⁴ Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 94-95.

⁶⁵ Guttman, *Philosophies of Judaism*, 95.

⁶⁶ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 1, 10.

⁶⁷ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 1.

⁶⁸ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 1-2.

period, highlights Pessin.⁶⁹ What Ibn Gabirol's use of *al- 'unṣur* demonstrates is a breaking of both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic convention, and instead the significant influence of the so-called Empedocleanism of the period. In Empedoclean circles, the term "*al- 'unṣur al-awwal*" meant "first element" or "prime element." Translating the phrase into Latin as "prime matter" erroneously introduces an Aristotelian concept which, as Pessin argues, goes against Ibn Gabirol's intentions.⁷⁰ There is nothing wrong *technically* with translating *al- 'unṣur al-awwal* as "prime matter." Yet translating this uncommon Arabic phrase into common Neoplatonic parlance hides the "Pseudo-Empedoclean Arabic textual traditions" at play in Ibn Gabirol's metaphysics, consequently leading to falsely criticizing him as "a misreader of Aristotle" (as Aquinas does).⁷¹ Ibn Gabirol is not "Aristotle-gone-bad," but "a theologically astute proponent of a Theology of Desire" who is working with both "Neoplatonic and Pseudo-Empedoclean ideas."⁷² In the context of his larger vision, it behooves the reader to read *al- 'unṣur al-awwal* in an Empedoclean manner, and to translate the phrase into "first element."⁷³

Pessin makes one more interpretive move. She opts for "*grounding* element" (instead of "first element") since "first element" might be misconstrued as a reference to God. The adjective "grounding" speaks to the role that this first "element" has as the "root" and "ground" of existence that "sustains" form.⁷⁴ Pessin's linguistic and textual analysis of both extant Arabic fragments of *Fons Vitae*⁷⁵ and Ibn Falaquera's condensed Hebrew translation support this change

⁶⁹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 22–24.

⁷⁰ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 23–24.

⁷¹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 24.

⁷² Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 24.

⁷³ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 25.

⁷⁴ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 25–26.

⁷⁵ The original was written in Arabic in the 11th century, and it was translated into Latin in the 12th century by Dominicus Gundissalinus and Johannes Hispanus. The only extant copy of the full text is the Latin. (Pessin, "Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicbron]," <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-gabirol/>.)

from “first” to “grounding.”⁷⁶ And importantly, Ibn Falaquera translates the Arabic “*al-‘unṣur*” as “*yesōd*” (*lit.* “foundation”), a Hebrew word found throughout Ibn Gabirol’s poetry.⁷⁷ What this means is that matter is what “founds” and “grounds” the entire “Chain of Being” (i.e. the emanation of being from the One to the many).⁷⁸ This corresponds with the way in which Ibn Gabirol renders “form and matter” in his poetry as “*sōd ve-yesōd*” (*lit.* “secret and foundation”).⁷⁹ Having made these qualifications, Pessin concludes: “Ibn Gabirol’s material Grounding Element is a thoroughly Pseudo-Empedoclean [i.e. matter-centric] and Neoplatonic emanating foundation at the heart of the Great Chain of Being.”⁸⁰ I base the remainder of my exegesis of Ibn Gabirol on Pessin’s reappraisal.

From Divine Will to Divine Desire

Logically, a shift to the notion of material grounding form necessitates a reconsideration of the classically construed Gabirolian concept of “Divine Will.” For in traditional readings of *Fons Vitae*, form and matter emerge simultaneously and are brought together by “divine will.” Pessin’s case for translating *irāda* as “desire” and not “will” is based on 1) Arabic and Hebraic linguistic analysis; 2) Ibn Gabirol’s stated intentions for *Fons Vitae*; and 3) the Andalusian mystico-philosophical context in which Ibn Gabirol writes. Translating *irāda* as “will” carries the distorting influences both of *Fons Vitae*’s Latin translation, *voluntas*, and of its Franciscan-Augustinian interpreters. Even though translating *al-irāda* as “will” is correct and valid (as

⁷⁶ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 23. Pessin works with the translation work of Solomon Munk. (192, fn. 36) In his Hebraic redaction, Ibn Falaquera uses *hōmer* for the Greek *hūlē*, which corresponds to the Arabic terms *hayūlā* and *mādda*. (23)

⁷⁷ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 23.

⁷⁸ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 2, 29, 30.

⁷⁹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 23; idem., “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: From Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century*, ed. S. Nadler and T. Rudavsky (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 292.

⁸⁰ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 26.

Pessin admits), such a move does not account for the Jewish philosopher-poet's "immediate Islamic philosophic-mystical context."⁸¹ The works of al-Qushayrī, the mysterious *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'* (*Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*), and other mystical and esoteric texts permeated the Andalusian intellectual and spiritual milieu (both Islamic and Jewish), where notions of desire were prevalent and prominent.⁸² With this in mind, it makes better sense to translate *al-irāda* as desire.⁸³ Lastly, even if direct Sufi influences on Ibn Gabirol cannot be conclusively established (though there is strong evidence of such), his poetic corpus demonstrates the primacy of desire and love in his thought.⁸⁴

Consequently, Pessin's rereading unites desire with matter that is already there as "the ground," yearning for form. Thus, matter holds primacy and priority over form within the Gabirolian metaphysics, per Pessin's revision. Matter is "prior to," "superior to," and even "more sublime than form"⁸⁵—to quote Clayton again, it "continually recedes from our grasp."⁸⁶ Ibn Gabirol's is not the only positive valuation of matter among Jewish medieval philosophers; there are others who reframe their Neoplatonist visions with some form of positive materialism.⁸⁷ Ibn

⁸¹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 21.

⁸² Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 18, 21. Cf. Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's Kuzari*, SUNY Series in Jewish Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000); idem., *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya Ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart*, Jewish Culture and Contexts (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

⁸³ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 21.

⁸⁴ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 17, 22. Although Arabic fragments for Ibn Gabirol's articulation of the love/desire relation are not extant, the evidence favors the reading that Ibn Gabirol might have used, among a wide, flexible range of terms, the Sufi term for passion (*'ishq/ 'ashiqā*) (*ibid.*, 17, 20). The term is also used by Maimonides to speak to the soul's truest engagement with God. (*ibid.* 17; cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, 3.51)

⁸⁵ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 14.

⁸⁶ Philip Clayton, "Unsolved Dilemmas," 50.

⁸⁷ Pessin highlights Isaac Israeli and Ibn Ḥasdai. Israeli states in his *Mantua Text*: "The beginning of all roots is two simple substances: one of them is first matter, which receives form and is known to the philosophers as the root of roots. It is the first substance which subsists in itself and is the substratum of diversity. The other is substantial form, which is ready to impregnate matter..." Ibn Ḥasdai echoes this in *The Prince and the Ascetic*, "The first of created things were two simple substances: the first matter which is the substratum for everything, i.e., the first hylic matter which is the substratum for all forms, and is called by the philosophers the genus of genera; and the

Gabirol posits that at the “core of reality” is “the presence of matter in all things,” a matter that is “pure” and “unformed.”⁸⁸

Theological Import: Matter from Divine Essence and Form from Divine Mind

These ontological shifts toward matter-as-desire also reframes the universe’s relation to God. In the traditional reception history and interpretation of *Fons Vitae*, God relates to the world by equiprimordially uniting matter and form through Her divine will. And this will is “external” to both, i.e. acting upon but not within. Pessin proposes that desire is embedded in matter itself, and that this desire flows *immediately* from Divine Essence. Meanwhile forms are sustained through the Divine Mind, hence *mediately* from Divine Essence. As Pessin puts it, “[I]t is precisely matter’s desire for form that involves the activity of Divine *Irāda*.”⁸⁹

This counters the typical Pythagorean, Platonic, and Aristotelian metaphysics that assert that matter is the “chaotic source of evil.”⁹⁰ Instead, the notion that matter is “created from Essence” posits a “link” between God and matter that is closer and “more intimate” than that between God and form.⁹¹ Instead of a simple emanation of being, Pessin argues, “God’s entry into the world is marked not only by a flow of being, but by a concomitant God-born (and God-directed) Desire-to-Be, Desire-to-Know, and Desire-for-Goodness manifest in the folds of matter.” Hence matter, and not form, “emerges as the highest, most essential aspect of reality.”⁹²

form which precedes that which is found with it, i.e., the perfect wisdom, by the conjunction of which with matter the nature of the intellect came into being, so that the intellect, being composed of it and matter, is a species of it.” (In Pessin, “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” 288.)

⁸⁸ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 13–14.

⁸⁹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 17.

⁹⁰ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 14, 36.

⁹¹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 14.

⁹² Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 2.

This further means that the “highest, most essential aspect of reality” is therefore *desire*, since “[matter] is present in all things” and consequently “introduces desire into all existents.”⁹³

Pessin points to the places in both *Fons Vitae* and the poetic corpus where matter is described in ways analogous to the way in which Divine Essence is described.⁹⁴ That matter is “hiddenness” and form is “embroidery”⁹⁵ is a way that is analogous to how the Divine Essence is hidden and Divine activity is manifest.⁹⁶ *Yesōd* as “Grounding Element,” like the Divine Essence, is “not-yet-manifest” and “limitless.”⁹⁷ This unbounded “grounding element” is more sublime because it is “created from Essence,” whereas form comes “from the *property* of Essence,” i.e. “Wisdom.”⁹⁸ As a result, this “Grounding Element” in Ibn Gabirol’s emanationist structure is prior to the “Intellect” that holds all forms. In fact, it is second only to the hidden God.⁹⁹ In his poetry, this *yesōd* is depicted as the “throne of God,” and as such, as the “root of roots.”¹⁰⁰ He declares, “Matter is as if the throne [*cathedra*] of unity, and Will, the giver of form sits in it and reposes above it.”¹⁰¹

This vision has ethical import: it is a “prescriptive vision” of how the human life should be lived when the human is “experiencing herself ‘qua matter’—that is, qua dependent, receptive, and fragile desirer after wisdom, goodness, and God.”¹⁰² The goal of *Fons Vitae* is “the ends of human being,” that is to say “living qua matter” that speaks of a “dependency,

⁹³ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 42–43.

⁹⁴ Pessin, “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” 289–91.

⁹⁵ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 7.

⁹⁶ Pessin, “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” 287.

⁹⁷ Pessin, “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” 289.

⁹⁸ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.42; in Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 14.

⁹⁹ Pessin, “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” 287.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.42; in Pessin, “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” 289.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.42; in Pessin, “Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World,” 289.

¹⁰² Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 2.

receptivity, and fragility born of desire.”¹⁰³ Ultimately, Ibn Gabirol’s notion that “the root of all things (including human beings) is rooted in matter” is in fact the notion that “the root of all things (including human beings) is rooted in *desire*.”¹⁰⁴ This desire in humans is for wisdom, goodness, and God.¹⁰⁵ Thus, desire is for union with the Source or as Ibn Gabirol writes: “the aim of desire and love is to strive to join and to unite with the beloved, and matter strives to be joined to form.”¹⁰⁶ What Ibn Gabirol constructs is a vision of the cosmos that “unfolds from matter to form,” and of God who “unfolds from Essence to being.”¹⁰⁷

To summarize: matter-as-desire is the higher principle in Ibn Gabirol’s doctrine of participation. As Grounding Element, which comes directly from the *Essence* of God, it sustains (i.e. “grounds”) existence and the “presence” of things. Moreover, there is an analogy that Ibn Gabirol posits between matter’s desire-to-be (which is actualized by sustaining form) and creation’s desire for its Fount.¹⁰⁸ As Pessin puts it, “Matter’s own key role is described in terms of desire..., and given that it is present in all things, matter in this way introduces desire into all existents.”¹⁰⁹ She asserts, “Where God reveals himself as the ‘Fountain of Life,’ our material core acts as the river through which we may return always to our source,”¹¹⁰ adding that Ibn

¹⁰³ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 5 (italics added for emphasis). Ibn Gabirol uses “desire” and “love” interchangeably. This relation between “love” and “desire” is evident in his poem, “I Love you,” and other works like *Fons Vitae*—for example, in *Fons Vitae* 5.32: “the aim of desire and love is to strive to join and to unite with the beloved, and matter strives to be joined to form.” (Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 17, 18–19) The role of love, desire or the erotic is not new to Ibn Gabirol per se, as there are precedences in Aristotle, *The Theology of Aristotle*, Al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and Pseudo Empedocles. (Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 43, 47) One could also include in this list the *actual* Empedocles, whose cosmogony was framed around dual confrontation between Love and Strife. (Cf. David Sedley, “Empedocles,” in *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity*, Sather Classical Lectures, 66 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009): 31–74.)

¹⁰⁵ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.32.

¹⁰⁷ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 8.

¹⁰⁸ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 17; cf. Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.32.

¹⁰⁹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 42–3.

¹¹⁰ Pessin, “Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicbron],” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-gabirol/>.

Gabirol “teaches of a Divine Desire through which the Divine Essence, exposed in all of His need, yearns for relation to the world and to the human soul, manifesting, in His yearning, the core of His desire at the core of being in and through the Grounding Element of Love.”¹¹¹ In short, created things (including humans) exist by participating in matter, and this matter introduces a desire for being, for good, and for God as the core of existence.¹¹² As Ibn Gabirol declares, “Everything that exists desires to be moved in order that it might attain something of the good of the Prime Being.”¹¹³ This ontology of desire is a crucial piece for a grounding metaphysics of wonder.

Ibn Gabirol’s Participation in Matter: Some Initial Implications for Wonder

Whereas at the end of this chapter there will be a fuller, comparative discussion of the three metaphysical schemata and their potential for grounding our notion of wonder, for now, briefly naming some implications for wonder in light of Ibn Gabirol are in order. So, bringing in the overarching question regarding wonder: What does matter mattering reveal regarding wonder?

First, matter is what gives persons and things their “here-ness” (or “presentness”), and this grounds both their unity in all things and their uniqueness among things. To say that something is “here” or “there” may be too obvious to need stating. But in this obviousness, there is a profound reality at play, one that both unites and distinguishes all existents.¹¹⁴ On the one

¹¹¹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 26.

¹¹² Pessin, “Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicebron],” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-gabirol/>.

¹¹³ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.32; cf. Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 42.

¹¹⁴ This is Jacques Maritain’s project, that is, preserving essences within the primacy of existence. He distinguishes between “authentic existentialism” and “apocryphal existentialism.” In the former, existential “primacy” is affirmed as a way of upholding and “preserving” essences as “manifesting the supreme victory of intellect and of intelligibility.” The latter, Maritain maintains, affirms the primacy of existence “as destroying and abolishing essences,” which undermines the intellect and intelligibility.” As he concludes, “For if you abolish essence, or that which *esse* posits, by that very act you abolish existence, or *esse*. Those two notions are correlative

hand, this “hereness” is universal to all beings and things. All things, in their materiality, share in “hereness.” All things share enfleshment; “my body is *in sympathy with things*.”¹¹⁵

Second, despite their shared materiality, each modality of “hereness,” i.e. each existent, is distinct by virtue of its formal definition, and in Ibn Gabirol, by its grade of matter. Hence, on the other hand, shared enfleshment is held in tension with the “disruptive difference” of each thing’s own integrity. This tension is part and parcel of the dynamics of wonder, as defined in the previous chapter. Only a metaphysics sturdy enough to sustain this dialectic between familiarity and dissimilarity, between “sympathetic” semblance and disruptive difference, will be adequate for the experience of wonder. One can argue that this tension is preserved when Ibn Gabirol writes, “[S]ince all things that exist are diverse by form and whatever things are diverse by form must agree in matter, it therefore follows, as a result, that the matter of the things that exist is one.”¹¹⁶ This structural tension is part of the “substance” of wonder.

Third, for Ibn Gabirol this *mattered* “hereness” comes with a certain “hiddenness” and “unboundedness” that can support the experience of hyleic “excess” in the event of wonder. Chapter 1 described wonder as being like the enduring note played on a violin.¹¹⁷ Wonder points to an excess in things, to a transcendence *within* things. In the experience of wonder, the object’s “primal impression” endures and *exceeds*, remaining intense even after intentioned reflection and other objectifying acts of thought. A matter-as-hereness that includes a certain hidden and unbounded quality to it can serve to ground the notion of excess ontologically in wonder.

and inseparable. An existentialism of this sort [i.e. ‘apocryphal’] is self-destroying.” In his *Existence and the Existent: An Essay on Christian Existentialism* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958), 13.

¹¹⁵ Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, 274.

¹¹⁶ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 201.

¹¹⁷ This is a favorite image for Husserl. In Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 208, 209, 214.

Fourth and finally, as Pessin interprets Ibn Gabirol, this “present-ness” is the desire to be and to know, which is ultimately a desire toward the good and toward Goodness itself. A striving toward goodness is part of the material constitution of created beings. This desire to know seems to ground the “epistemic posture” that is latent—“always there!”—in wonder. To be is to desire to know and to know that which is good. (Goodness is discussed in greater depth in the section on Aquinas.) Again, there is a strong compatibility here between an embedded desire to be and to know at the metaphysical level, and a desirous openness in wonder with which one relates to the world at the level of experience.

These are some initial impressions of the promise of a Gabirolian metaphysics for the experience of wonder. More will be drawn out from Ibn Gabirol’s insights in a later comparison with Ibn ‘Arabī and Aquinas. These are simply initial impressions that summarize the gleanings from Ibn Gabirol and potentially support the metaphysical understanding of wonder. Next, the doctrine of participation in Ibn ‘Arabī is discussed.

Participation in Ibn ‘Arabī: Participating in Wujūd (“Being [as Finding/Been Found]”)

Synopsis

This section demonstrates that Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of participation posits that the “higher principle” in which things participate is *wujūd*—the word early Islamic *falsafa* used for “being” or “existence.” Yet, Ibn ‘Arabī plays with the etymology of the term, lifting up its original, quotidian meaning: *wujūd* as “finding,” “perceiving,” or “seeing.”¹¹⁸ In doing so, this

¹¹⁸ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 916; Sajjad H. Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy: Ibn ‘Abari and Mullā Ṣadrā,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adams and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 234. *Wujūd* entered into mainstream Islamic philosophical discourse around the time of Avicenna (d. 1037). It was translated as “being” or “existence.” Its quotidian meaning, though, is “to find, experience, feel, and perceive.” (916) Ibn ‘Arabī utilized for its specialized and everyday meaning. Therefore, God was *Wujūd* in that God was necessarily *is* (Avicennian influence, pp. 916, 917) but also in that God was necessarily finds, experiences, and knows. (916) As with many of the great mystics

“greatest master” (*Shaykh al-Akbar*)¹¹⁹ brings together ontology and epistemology as two sides of the same coin.¹²⁰ *Wujūd* is properly assigned to God alone, whereas all else merely participates in *wujūd*; the derivative term, *mawjūd* (“what is found/perceived/seen”), designates those others. Creation participates in *wujūd* by way of the Breath of the Merciful (*Nafas al-Rahmān*).¹²¹ Therefore, analogous to Ibn Gabirol’s scheme in which participating in the “grounding element” means participating in divine desire, to participate in the “Breath” of *Wujūd* is to participate in divine *mercy*.

This section begins with some clarifying comments regarding the reception history of Ibn ‘Arabī, since it is riddled with major misconceptions and polemical reactions to him based on those misunderstandings. It begins this way so that the basic participatory structure can be elucidated accurately. Second, it discusses and analyzes *wujūd* and its derivative *mawjūd*. This includes the important shift that Ibn ‘Arabī makes by defining *Wujūd* as “finding” and “what is found,” which, for Chittick, means understanding God to be Ultimate “Consciousness” and not simply Ultimate *Being*.¹²² Third, it articulates the theological dimension of Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of participation, bringing to the fore the notion of Divine Breath as Mercy. I begin by identifying and eliminating misconceptions.

(across the Abrahamic faiths, really), ontology and epistemology are brought together. (Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 916–17.)

¹¹⁹ Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi*, 1.

¹²⁰ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 233.

¹²¹ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237; cf. Özgür Koca, “Whitehead and Ibn Arabi (1165-1240): Thoughts on Process and Sufi Metaphysics,” *Process Studies* 44, no. 2 (2015): 271.

¹²² Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 915 ff.

What Ibn 'Arabī Did Not Say

For centuries, Muslim polemicists credited Ibn 'Arabī with the notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (lit. “unity of being/existence”).¹²³ Consequently, the “greatest master” was deemed a heretic, an unbeliever, or even, in the words of Ibn Taymiyyah, “worse than an unbeliever,” a pantheist who “failed to distinguish between God and creation.”¹²⁴ Yet, in Ibn 'Arabī's vast corpus, the phrase, *waḥdat al-wujūd*, is nowhere to be found, nor did his earliest followers put that phrase in his mouth.¹²⁵ Yes, unity and being were both weight-bearing pillars of his metaphysics. But he never used the phrase. Consequently, nor did he intend to affirm any pantheistic theology.¹²⁶ Instead, he affirmed the absolute transcendence of God as *al-wujūd al-ḥaqq* (“true being” or “real being”).¹²⁷ Playing on the etymological root of *wujūd* as “seeing” or “finding,” True Being (i.e. God) is unknown and unseen, manifested only by the divine act of mercy.¹²⁸ In contrast to Ibn Taymiyyah's accusation, Ibn 'Arabī maintains the radical transcendence of God, due in large part to his Ash'ari theological proclivities.¹²⁹

¹²³ Izutsu's work assumed that Ibn 'Arabī did in fact said this. Yet, despite the depth and insight he gives to his readings of *wujūd* in his work on Ibn Sīnā, Ibn 'Arabī, Suhrawardī and other “Persian existentialists” (as he calls them), he does maintain this false attribution to Ibn 'Arabī. (See his *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 1 ff.) Ibn 'Arabī was not from Persia but from Andalusia, and these two intellectual “topographies” were distinction. Nevertheless, Henry Corbin is right in placing him, intellectually between Eastern/Persian and Western/Andalusian thought. See his *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn 'Arabī* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 3–38.

¹²⁴ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 915–16. Cf. Toby Mayer, “Theology and Sufism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 275. Some believed that the notion of “the unity of being” undermined jurisprudence. Cf. Steffen A.J. Stelzer, “Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 161–179. For a full treatment of Islamic responses to Ibn 'Arabī over the centuries, see: Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition*; and, Yusri Mohamad Ramli, “Martyrdom of Al-Hallaj and Unity of the Existence: The Condemners and the Commenders,” *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 3, (06, 2013): 106–112.

¹²⁵ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 916.

¹²⁶ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy, 235.

¹²⁷ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 916; Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 234–35.

¹²⁸ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy, 236–37.

¹²⁹ Cf. William C. Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-'arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2009), 33 ff.

Second, to add to the confusion, even when *wahdat al-wujūd* is attributed to him (affirmatively or not), there is little consensus about what he intended by it.¹³⁰ For Ibn ‘Arabī’s work is extremely difficult, and his style “unnecessarily complicated.” He is a writer “with no real predecessor.”¹³¹ Some suggest that the difficulty is due to his “mystical” approach to reality. William C. Chittick disagrees, pointing out that the rapid distribution of his works after those of Ibn ‘Arabī’s was due to the fact that his readers “were convinced by the soundness of his arguments and the breadth of his learning.” His works, even the more esoteric material, was written “with a rational precision that puts him into the mainstream of Islamic scholarship.”¹³² Still, some scholars resist any attempts to over-rationalize Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach,¹³³ while others support a rationalistic view so long as the definitions of “reason” and “philosophy” are broadened.¹³⁴ Still others reconcile the two.¹³⁵

Lastly, modern reads make a mistake when reading the Islamic tradition’s “existentialism” (Ibn Sīnā, Ibn ‘Arabī and others), a mistake commonly made *after* twentieth-century *European* existentialism (Heidegger, Sartre, etc.). As Izutsu rightly argues, *wujūd*, or absolute existence, of the Islamic “existentialists” should not be confused by the Continental European tradition’s distinction between “my existence” and “your existence.” The latter contends that the former is “quite colorless, bleak and chilly.” Yet this is not the case when one

¹³⁰ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 916.

¹³¹ Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, 1.

¹³² Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, 2–3.

¹³³ E.g. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 44 ff.

¹³⁴ Chittick, “Ibn Arabi,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹³⁵ Rizvi sees Ibn ‘Arabī a “rationalizing mystic” working within the late antique Neoplatonism. He writes, “The late antique Neoplatonic traditions recognized numerous ‘ways’ to the truth, including that of the ‘rationalizing mystic’ who is capable of articulating a philosophical and discursive language for his experiences that are non-propositional, non-conceptual, and even lacking in ‘cognitive content’ insofar as human reason can comprehend it.” (“Mysticism and philosophy,” 227, 225). Interestingly, Ibn ‘Arabī thought of himself as “above most Ṣūfīs,” and and he “disdained philosophers.” (226)

appropriately considers what is meant by *wujūd*.¹³⁶ *Wujūd* has a personal (though not individualistic) and even salvific quality to it.¹³⁷ Achieving knowledge of *this* existence, argues Mullā Ṣadrā, must be an intuitive, not demonstrative or logical, journey, one which leads the human knower to *know from within*.¹³⁸ With this said, Izutsu contends that there is more similitude between the two than meets the eye, particularly “in their most basic structure.” For, he says, they “both go back to one and the same root experience... of existence,” what in Islam is called *aṣālat al-wujūd*, the “fundamental reality of existence”.¹³⁹ Hence, the “awareness of existence” is the “starting point” both for Continental existentialism and for the Muslim philosophers of *wujūd*.¹⁴⁰ Now, with these misunderstandings excised, one can more clearly understand Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of participation in *wujūd*, to which we now turn.

Being and Finding: Wujūd

The existential contingency of created reality grounds both ontology and epistemology for Ibn ‘Arabī and for the tradition that emerges from him.¹⁴¹ Ibn ‘Arabī declares, “The existence attributed to each created thing is the existence of the Reality [i.e. God], since the contingent does not possess being. However, the entities of contingents are receptacles for the manifestation of Being.”¹⁴² The Real *Wujūd* is the necessary Being of “infinite potentialities,” upon which the contingent creation is “absolutely” dependent.¹⁴³

¹³⁶ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 43.

¹³⁷ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 233.

¹³⁸ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 10.

¹³⁹ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 44.

¹⁴⁰ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 46. In fact, Izutsu contends that Heidegger’s “unprecedented” and “revolutionary break” with Aristotelian ontology is neither revolutionary nor unprecedented; rather, it began with the “philosophers of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* school.” (47)

¹⁴¹ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 236.

¹⁴² In Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 236; cf. *Meccan Revelations* II, 69.3-4.

¹⁴³ Özgür Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality: Ibn ‘Arabī, Causes and Freedom,” *Sophia* 4, no. 4 (2017), doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

Again, ontology and epistemology are inseparable for Ibn ‘Arabī since “being” and “finding” are both denotations of *wujūd*. Also, besides grounding all being and all knowing, *wujūd* also serves to distinguish God, the Real *Wujūd*, as infinite being and infinite knowing, and all else as delimited, created participants in Divine being and knowing. Consequently, only God can rightly be called “being” (*wujūd*), since “being and what is ‘found’ through pure experience are the same.,”¹⁴⁴ only God is *Wujūd* because only God can see all that is. The sages in *kalām*, working from this presupposition, listed “the finder” (*al-wājjid*) “among God’s ‘most beautiful names’ (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*).”¹⁴⁵

Real *Wujūd* is unutterable. It cannot be expressed since it is “no thing” and therefore defies all the categories used to describe (i.e. express) *things*. This is Ibn ‘Arabī’s negative, apophatic theology. As *al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*, the Real *Wujūd* has no quiddity (*māhiyya*), following in the footsteps of Ibn Sīnā. In this sense, the Real *Wujūd* is “no thing,” but rather that which gives existence (*mawjūd*) to all things.¹⁴⁶ Chittick summarizes this notion succinctly:

The Necessary Being cannot not be, and it can have no need for things, which in themselves are nonexistences. The Real *Wujūd* is simply that which is and that which finds, that which cannot not be and cannot not find. It is free of all the limitations that define every specificity, every entity.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 234.

¹⁴⁵ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 916.

¹⁴⁶ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 917.

¹⁴⁷ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 917–18. Chittick here is right in pointing to the language of necessity and contingency to demonstrate Avicennian influences.

It manifests itself by itself, and, “in its utter lack of thingness,” makes manifest all other things.¹⁴⁸ Only at this level, that is, at the level of *Wujūd* manifesting itself by itself, can one speak of the simple “unity of being.”¹⁴⁹

Now, there are degrees of existence or “unfolding Being.”¹⁵⁰ There are three self-disclosed levels or degrees, and beyond these, the unknown and unseen Being. The first degree is that of “intrinsic attributes, which refer to the essence in which there is no duality (*al-aḥadiyya*) and in which the divine essence is emanated to the other attributes through the Most Holy Emanation.”¹⁵¹ The second degree refers to the “manifestations” of God in which God is described as seeing, hearing, and the like. The last degree of existence is “the emanation of the attributes through the Holy Emanation (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*) and the divine creative command and Breath of the Merciful (*Nafas al-Rahmān*).” God is considered to be in relation to the world only at this third level.¹⁵² This third level grounds Ibn ‘Arabī’s cataphatic theology, affirming that what is known of the “Nondelimited” *Wujūd* is ultimately a delimitation of the same.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 917–18. Another image Ibn ‘Arabī employs is that of light (*nūr*), which is a Quranic image for God—God is “the light of the heavens and the earth.” (*An-Nur* 24:35; cf. Psalm 36:9, “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”) (918) “This Light bestows fondness and finding on all things, each in its own measure—not in the measure of the Light itself.” (Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 918) Ibn ‘Arabī writes, “Were it not for light, nothing whatsoever would be perceived, whether it be an object of knowledge, or an object of sense perception, or an object of imagination.... The faculties of smell, taste, imagination, memory, reason, reflection, conception, and every through which perception takes place are all light.” (918)

¹⁴⁹ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235. Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of three levels of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and of how the Word “marks” each level. The three levels are: “unity of acts” (*tawḥīd al-af‘āl*; where the law operates, as the “science of action”); “the unity of names” (*tawḥīd al-asmā’*; where *knowledge* and *understanding* of law manifests itself, so that it may be, properly speaking, *knowledge*); and, “unity of essence” (*tawḥīd al-dhāt*; the apophatic, mystical realm). It is at the level of understanding where one places the human condition vis-a-vis the giving of the law. (169) Reason’s role in this second level is clear. (Steffen A.J. Stelzer, “Ethics,” 169.)

¹⁵⁰ The language of “unfolding” and “enfolding” will later become central to Nicholas of Cusa’s metaphysics. Cf. Nancy Hudson, “Divine Immanence: Nicholas of Cusa’s Understanding of Theophany and the Retrieval of a ‘New’ Model of God,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 56, no. 2 (2005): 450–70; Joshua Hollmann, *The Religious Concordance: Nicholas of Cusa and Christian-Muslim Dialogue*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, v. 185 (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

¹⁵¹ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 236–37.

¹⁵² Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237.

¹⁵³ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 917.

Dual Participation of “Being Found” (Mawjūd): Divine Breath and Divine Names

Ibn ‘Arabī’s ontological structure can be understood as a dual participation in which all existents participate for both their existence and their essence. For their existence, they participate in the Breath of the Merciful; for their essence, in the Divine Names. Although Ibn ‘Arabī never describes this structure in terms of “dual participation,” this dissertation proposes that this is a faithful description of what Ibn ‘Arabī is intending. Also, within the larger vision of the chapter, the priority is for *existential* features. Nevertheless, the role of both Divine Breath and Divine Names are necessarily discussed.

Beginning with *wujūd* and its manifesting “breath”: since *wujūd* is reserved authentically for God, *mawjūd* (“what is found”) is designated for all other created things. Things are “delimitations” (*taqyīd*) of *wujūd*, diverse “modalities” of “foundness.”¹⁵⁴ In both the schools of Ibn ‘Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā, the forms that receive existence from Being are called “temples of contingency” (*hayākil al-mumkināt*) and “tablets of quiddities” (*alwāḥ al-māhiyyāt*).¹⁵⁵ For Ibn ‘Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā (who builds on Ibn ‘Arabī), essences are ultimately, though not entirely, unreal.¹⁵⁶ In other words, “essences in themselves do not exist in concrete reality but are merely notional and intentional,”¹⁵⁷ and are consequently “grasped” through “universals.”¹⁵⁸ Hence, the difference between True Being and the existence of existents goes beyond the

¹⁵⁴ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 916.

¹⁵⁵ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237–38. This deviates from Ibn Sīnā, who gives essences the roles of intermediation. (238)

¹⁵⁶ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 238.

¹⁵⁷ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 238.

¹⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī writes, “Know that universal entities, even though they do not possess existence in themselves, are intelligible and knowable insofar as one can ascribe existence to them. They can be considered to exist in themselves but [in themselves] they can be neither divisible nor differentiated. They exist in themselves through every individual of a species that is ascribed to them, such as individual humans in relation to humanity, but they neither differentiate nor are multiplied by multiple individuals, remaining intelligible [only].” (In Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 238; cf. *The Bezels of Wisdom* I, 52.15-53-4)

Avicennian distinction between essence and existence. There is also a “notional/mental [i.e. intentional] dissection.”¹⁵⁹

Although the “phenomena” of existents may be “shadowy figures” that are simply “objectified forms” of existence, this does not mean that phenomenal existence is completely “devoid of reality,” according to the school of Ibn ‘Arabī. Rather, such phenomena “are real *if* they are considered in relation to their metaphysical source.”¹⁶⁰ Creation-as-*mawjūd* is only real because it is “found” by the Finder. The manifold phenomena of the rest of creation are “self-disclosures and theophanies of the single Being.” Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of a “relational existence” whereby existents “annex [i.e. participate in] their existence from the other.”¹⁶¹ They “participate” in Being. That is, they have no existence in themselves, for the universe “has nothing of its own to support its existence.”¹⁶² Instead, the cosmos exists “through the grace of Being.”¹⁶³ “What is actual and is found exists,” but its existence is neither accidental nor essential.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 238.

¹⁶⁰ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 12 (italics added for emphasis). Izutsu adds, “Even a mirage is not altogether unreal in the sense that its perception is induced by the actual existence of a wide stretch of desert land. But in a metaphysical perspective, the desert land which is the empirical basis of the mirage must itself be regarded as something of the nature of a mirage, if it is compared with the ultimate ground of reality.” Izutsu finds here an analogy to the Vedantic perspective of Shankara, when the latter declares, “The world is a continuous series of cognitions of Brahman.” Izutsu explains, “For Shankara too, the phenomenal world is Brahman or the absolute Reality itself as it appears to the ordinary human consciousness in accordance with the natural structure of the latter... like in Islamic philosophy.” (12, 13) For a fully comparative treatments of Shankara and Ibn ‘Arabī, see Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006.)

¹⁶¹ In Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235.

¹⁶² In Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, 131.

¹⁶³ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 234.

¹⁶⁴ Mullā Ṣadrā, working from this presupposition that there are grades or degrees of existentiality (239) Mullā Ṣadrā writes, “Existence has degrees of existentiality, and Being possesses different modes.” (in 239; cf. *Asfār* VI, 277.1-3) Rizvi understands Mullā Ṣadrā to escape the monist/pluralist argument by speaking of this “intensities” of existence within a unitive reality. (239) “Different intensities mean different degrees of content in our experience of things, corresponding to greater and lesser degrees of the manifestation of Being.” (239)

To be mentioned is the *essential* side of the doctrine of participation for Ibn ‘Arabī, namely, participation in the Divine Names.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, given the focus here on *Wujūd* and its Breath as grounding existence, a brief explanation of how entities participate in the Divine Names is useful. What are these “Names”? The Divine Names are “presences” (i.e. self-disclosures), each with its own “sphere of quality.”¹⁶⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī uses “presence” (*hadra*) to designate a realm in which Being is manifest “under the auspices of a general quality.” This can be understood roughly as “world (‘*ālam*)” or “level” (*martaba*). In *Meccan Revelations*, “name” is equivalent to presence, that is, to speak of “a name’s realm of influence” as disclosed in the universe and humanity.¹⁶⁷

Some names have a greater “compass” (*iḥāṭa*) than others. The greatest of these is “Allah,” from which emerges, “linguistically and ontologically,” all of the divine names.¹⁶⁸ Like Ibn Sīnā, Ibn ‘Arabī posits seven primary names or presences: “life, knowledge, desire, power, speech, generosity, and justice.”¹⁶⁹ There is a relative compass to each.¹⁷⁰ Entities are “at once

¹⁶⁵ In the Ibn ‘Arabī studies, both Koca and Chittick utilize the doctrine of participation to explain how entities relate *essentially* to God. Koca simply, and more compellingly, speaks of direct participation of entities in the Divine Names. (Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x) Chittick utilizes the much more complicated notion of “the Five Divine Presences.” Chittick explains, “...in his chapter on the divine names in *Openings*, he uses presence to designate a name’s realm of influence and then describes various ways in which the properties and traces of the name are displayed in the cosmos and human beings; one might say that he is describing how things participate in Platonic ideas. The most inclusive of these presences is the ‘divine’ (*al-hadrat al-ilāhiyya*), that is, the realm that comes under the sway of the all-comprehensive name. Concerning it Ibn ‘Arabī writes, ‘There is nothing in Being/existence [*wujūd*] but the Divine Presence, which is His Essence, His attributes, and His acts.’ (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 1911 edition, 2:114.14)” (William Chittick, “Ibn Arabi,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>)

¹⁶⁶ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 921.

¹⁶⁷ William Chittick, “Ibn Arabi,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>.

¹⁶⁸ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 921.

¹⁶⁹ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 921.

¹⁷⁰ Chittick explains, “If God is the knower, this means that he is already alive. If he is the desirer, this means that he desires something he already knows. If he is the powerful, this means that he exercises his control because he desires to do so. His speech is then the articulation of the infinite entities over which he has power, his generosity the bestowal of being on the entities, and his justice the positioning of each entity in its proper place.” (Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 921)

manifesting and participating in the attributes of the infinite God.”¹⁷¹ Koca further explains that entities are free, powerful, able to know, etc., but only to the extent that they participate (in ways delimited by their natures) in the divine freedom, power, knowledge, and so forth.¹⁷² “An entity is both the sum of its relations to God and a causally efficacious agent participating in God’s qualities.”¹⁷³ “[T]he world is both carrier (*hâmil*) and carried (*mahmûl*).”¹⁷⁴ In participating in these Divine Names, entities are both “vertically” related to God and “horizontally” related to other entities.¹⁷⁵ Intelligibility and perceived constancy and order are grounded in these horizontal relations, which are in turn grounded by their vertical relation to God.¹⁷⁶

Consequently, it can be proposed that created things participate in God for both their individual existences and their individual quiddities. They participate *existentially* in the Divine Breath; they participate *essentially* in Divine Names. Ibn ‘Arabī develops a doctrine of dual participation in which entities participate in two types of higher principles: The Divine Breath as the *existential* principle, and the Divine Names as the *essential* principles. The former grounds a thing’s *that-it-is* or existence, and the latter, its *what-it-is* or quintessence.

Therefore, I contend that Ibn ‘Arabī’s ontological structure employs a doctrine of *dual* participation: an existential and essential participation. This would support Ibn ‘Arabī’s commitment to a) creation’s total, dependent relation to God, and b) his understanding of entities

¹⁷¹ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

¹⁷² Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

¹⁷³ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

¹⁷⁴ Ibn Al-‘Arabī, et. al. *The Meccan Revelations*, vol. 1, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz, trans. William C. Chittick and James W. Morris (New York: Pir Press, 2002), 52.

¹⁷⁵ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

¹⁷⁶ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

as participatory “nexus of the Divine Names.”¹⁷⁷ Working from Ibn ‘Arabī’s statement, “In reality, there is nothing but the names of God in existence,”¹⁷⁸ Koca explains,

From the perspective of relationality, an entity is defined by its relations to God, to the extent that these relations make the totality of the entity. Ibn ‘Arabī’s rejection of self-subsisting substance/s allows him to perceive an entity as a bundle of different qualities and acts. His relational metaphysics traces all of the entity’s qualities back to God’s qualities. An entity is, then, perceived as manifestations of these qualities. In other words, *an entity is described as the sum of its relations to God.*¹⁷⁹

The Divine Names are “theological categories” that describe the relations that constitute any given existent, since “there is nothing but the names of God in existence.” Each thing is simply “an individualized collectivity of the divine theophanies.”¹⁸⁰

Within Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion of dual participation, existence still trumps essence. To follow his controlling metaphor of breathing: the activity speech plays a key role for Ibn ‘Arabī in describing the relation between Real *Wujūd*, its self-disclosures in the Divine Names, and the participation of creation in both the Breath and the Names.¹⁸¹ In speaking, the Breath of the All-Merciful “existentiates the cosmic words in the substratum that is his breath.”¹⁸² As the existential principle, Divine Breath is ontologically “prior” to the Names, in much the same way that Ibn Gabirol’s *yesōd* is prior to forms. Rizvi concurs: “Being is thus taken as primary, and phenomenal existence as the arena of its unfolding.”¹⁸³ In Ibn ‘Arabī’s epistemology, existence has primacy over essence, since essences are “inert, mental notions that are empty.”¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

¹⁷⁸ cf. Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, vol. 9 (Cairo, 1911; reprinted, Beirut: Dār Sādir, n.d.), III. 352. (translation by Koca); in Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x;

¹⁷⁹ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x. (Italics added for emphasis.)

¹⁸⁰ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

¹⁸¹ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 921.

¹⁸² Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 922.

¹⁸³ In Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy, 236.

¹⁸⁴ In Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy, 236.

A Note of Humanity: The Human as “Book”

Before moving to subsections of theological import and initial implications for wonder, a note on the special status of humans is necessary. Ibn ‘Arabī posits that there are three books (*kitāb*) which contain God’s speech: the cosmos (macrocosm), humans (microcosms), and scripture. As divine speech, they are *āyāt* (“signs”).¹⁸⁵ The relation of things to the Real *Wujūd* is like that of words to breath: words cannot be uttered without breath but are nonetheless distinct from breath.¹⁸⁶ The cosmos and the humans in it are the “constant re-voicing of existence”¹⁸⁷ at each and every moment; and each moment is distinct from the previous since, declares Ibn ‘Arabī, “There is no repetition in self-disclosure.”¹⁸⁸

Hence, the Real *Wujūd* self-discloses in these three all-encompassing forms. Recall that “cosmos” (*‘ālam*), “knowledge” (*‘ilm*), and “mark” (*‘alāma*) all share the same root word. Hence, “cosmos” (*‘ālam*) is classically defined as “that through which knowledge occurs,” or even “that through which God is known.”¹⁸⁹ Playing on this shared etymology, Ibn ‘Arabī declares, “We mention *cosmos* with this word to give *knowledge* that by it we mean that God has made it a *mark*.”¹⁹⁰ The cosmos is everything besides God, and it is the entirety of God’s self-disclosure (though not the entirety of God Herself, who is infinite).

Second, Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysical project is informed by his overall jurisprudential vision and is based specifically on the notion of deiformity.¹⁹¹ Deiformity is structured on the common Neoplatonist scheme for origin and return, or descent and ascent. The human is called to ascend,

¹⁸⁵ The term *āyāt* (“signs”) is also the word for “verses” of the Qur’ān.

¹⁸⁶ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 922.

¹⁸⁷ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 922.

¹⁸⁸ In Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 922.

¹⁸⁹ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 918.

¹⁹⁰ In Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 918.

¹⁹¹ A correlating notion exist in Eastern Orthodoxy in the form of *theosis* (“deification”).

and in ascending, one's existence-as-finding [i.e. *wujūd*] intensifies and becomes increasingly realized. Ibn 'Arabī and others speak of the arcs (*qaws*) of descent and ascent as “the circle of existence/consciousness” (*dā'irat al-wujūd*).¹⁹² Growing knowledge of the world, therefore, leads to greater knowledge of God, since the former reveals for the one searching the Source of existence, albeit in partial and broken ways. Growing self-awareness also marks the path to God. As Rivzi explains, “It is our self-conceptualization as existing entities that assists us in recognizing divine existence, since our awareness of our selves is the basis for the central cosmological proof of God.”¹⁹³

As the “book” with self-consciousness that can ascend by “finding” or “perceiving” (as in *wujūd*) in a way analogous to God, humans have the potential of finding divine “presences” or “names.” “As an *all-comprehensive* self-disclosure of the Real, the human microcosm has the potential to find the presence of each name within itself and bring it into actuality.”¹⁹⁴ Humans are *Wujūd*'s “all-comprehensive, microcosmic self-disclosures.” As comprehensive creatures—that is, creatures that can find, perceive, and comprehend—they have been bestowed with “consciousness, awareness, and the quest to realize their own potential.”¹⁹⁵ Thus, persons find themselves on a specific “station” (*maqām*) on the arc of ascent. This is deformity for Ibn 'Arabī. As Chittick puts it, “Simply by existing, human beings are in the process of becoming characterized by the character traits of God.”¹⁹⁶ Perception is tied to the “station” of the perceiver.¹⁹⁷ In other words, each station is a corollary of being or “being found” and “finding”

¹⁹² In Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 923.

¹⁹³ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235–236.

¹⁹⁴ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 923. (Italics added for emphasis.)

¹⁹⁵ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 928.

¹⁹⁶ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 923.

¹⁹⁷ Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 924.

or “knowing”—i.e. *wujūd*. Chittick writes, “As for ‘knowing,’ it is simply our *wujūd*, our finding that we find and are found, our presence to our own finding. Such finding underlies all consciousness and explication, just as it underlies all existence.”¹⁹⁸

Of course, ascent for Ibn ‘Arabī is tied to the devotional life that seeks to be submitted to God.¹⁹⁹ This is where the third “book,” the Holy Qur’an, plays a “norming” role and consequently an authoritative one. The danger for humans as “finders” is an “endless dispersion” in their yearning to know all. The third form of self-disclosure—scripture—is the solution.²⁰⁰ The revelation is known as *Qur’ān* (lit. “that which brings together,” though it is common understood as “recitation”), and as *Furqān* (lit. “that which discerns and differentiates”). For Ibn ‘Arabī, this is significant, for it means that scripture is the “two eyes” through which humans receive and discern the self-disclosure of God. Scripture is “the simultaneous manifestation of the principles of oneness and manyness.”²⁰¹

Theological Import: Participating in Being/Finding as Mercy.

Like Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī’s “highest principle,” *wujūd*, is appropriated to a divine attribute. Here the focus is on the existential (not essential) principle, namely, Divine Breath. With Ibn Gabirol, the “highest principle” is tied to divine *desire*; with Ibn ‘Arabī, it is divine *mercy*. For Ibn ‘Arabī, mercy is the source and ground all existence. Rizvi writes, “The Breath of

¹⁹⁸ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 917.

¹⁹⁹ (Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 924–927.) Ibn ‘Arabī declares, “People are bound to worship only what they believe about the Real, so they worship nothing but a created thing,” (924) which is a form of idolatry. (925) The only way out is by “striving to undo the knots that define their beliefs, break their idols, and to focus on the Nondelimited Real itself.” “Their relative freedom allows them to participate actively in the unfolding of their own possibility, to shape and mold their own becoming, to accept responsibility for their own final stations by making day-by-day choices in life.” (925) This is assisted by scripture and exemplar models in life (i.e. prophets and saints) (925–26), the greatest of which is the Prophet Muhammad. (927)

²⁰⁰ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 919–20.

²⁰¹ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 920. Cf. Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 22.

the Merciful (*Nafas al-Rahmān*) is the process by which Being becomes manifest and things obtain their existence in the cosmos according to the level of their ‘disposition’ to receive the manifestation of Being in themselves.”²⁰² Ibn ‘Arabī believed that “The Breath of the Merciful (*Nafas al-Rahmān*)” was “Being that is spread out (*munbasit*) and manifest.”²⁰³ It brings forth and upholds all existents and the cosmos as a whole. Ibn ‘Arabī identifies this Breath with “the primordial cloud of being (*al-‘amā*), the ‘dust’ (*al-habā’*),²⁰⁴ the prime matter, and the primordial element.”²⁰⁵ Eerily similar to the Gabirolian vision, this Breath as “prime matter” is “the foundational substrate” that is “an uncaused cause of all things that we perceive in phenomenal reality.”²⁰⁶ Rivzi adds, “The breath is the exoteric and subaltern aspect of divine Being: it is the reality that is created and creates (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bi-hi*).”²⁰⁷ It both is “created and creates.” It is therefore known as “universal reality” (*al-ḥaqqīqa al-kullīyya*).²⁰⁸ This Breath “unfolds,” serving as the font of existence.²⁰⁹ As a created manifestation, it is passive, an “inert potency requiring divine Being to actualize it.” But as a creating agent, it actively creates. Thus, it is the intermediary between Creator and created things, between True Being and existents.

This seems to be how Ibn ‘Arabī avoids the slip into pantheism—a charge lodged against him by later readers of his work. Ibn ‘Arabī’s monism—or as Koca puts it, “non-dualism”²¹⁰—is nuanced and qualified: it *does not* posit that there is a “hypostatic continuity and unity of God,

²⁰² Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237.

²⁰³ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237.

²⁰⁴ *Ali ‘Imran* 3.59; Genesis 2:7.

²⁰⁵ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237. The language of “dust” is quranic and biblical (cf. *Ali ‘Imran* 3.59; Genesis 2:7).

²⁰⁶ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237; cf. Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations* II, 431-2, 310, 390.

²⁰⁷ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237. Here, Rivzi is using language from Mullā Ṣadrā (237; cf. *Asfār* II, 328.10).

²⁰⁸ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237; cf. Ibn ‘Arabī, *The Meccan Revelations* I, 119, III, 199.

²⁰⁹ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 237.

²¹⁰ Koca, “The World as a Theophany and Causality,” doi:10.1007/s11841-017-0621-x.

cosmos, and man.”²¹¹ Rather, the school of Ibn ‘Arabī (and that of Mullā Ṣadrā) asserts an infinite difference between “Being” (*wujūd*), which applies uniquely to God, and “existence” (*mawjūd*), which applies to “all that there is insofar as they are theophanies of divine names and acts.”²¹² With this distinction, I propose that Ibn ‘Arabī makes a technical move also found in Christian trinitarian dogmatics, which distinguishes yet relates the “economic” and “immanent” Trinity. As Rizvi explains, “God is existent (*mawjūd*) insofar as he is disclosed to us, but Being insofar as he is unknown and unseen (*ghayb*),”²¹³ insofar as he is “a pure, unconditioned, unqualified, and hidden Being.”²¹⁴ He adds, “There is a unity of Being but existence is not a singular reality. It is our self-conceptualization as existing entities that assists us in recognizing divine existence.”²¹⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī distinguishes epistemologically between the “immanent” and “economic” *Wujūd*, while maintaining ontological unity.

Finally, the principle of Mercy further maintains the radical difference between Creator and creation. This is because the act of mercy not only implies but necessitates a giver and a given-to/recipient. Mercy is an unmerited giving. It is unidirectional. This is why, in Islam, it is distinguished from love, which is mutual.²¹⁶ The giving of *Wujūd* to contingent existents is mercy precisely because the act of creation likewise is unidirectional. Creation is nothing less than “the bestowal of mercy.” As Ibn ‘Arabī declares, “The cosmos is identical with mercy,

²¹¹ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235.

²¹² Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235.

²¹³ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235.

²¹⁴ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 234.

²¹⁵ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235–36.

²¹⁶ William C. Chittick, “The Islamic Notion of Mercy,” *HuffPost*, December 14, 2010 [updated May 25, 2011], https://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-c-chittick-phd/the-islamic-notion-of-mer_b_795275.html, accessed July 16, 2017.

nothing else. ... Hence the abode of mercy is the abode of *wujud*.”²¹⁷ As such, mercy is never a transaction; it is a donation—a gift. Existence is a gift.

Mercy “marks” the other two “books” of God’s speech: humanity and scripture. The human is called to obedience to God, and *sharī‘ah* “expresses the nature of *wujud* itself.”²¹⁸ Thus, *sharī‘ah* is nothing less than the guide to living the life of compassion and mercy that God intends for humanity. Mercy is the subtext of the very notion that the human is, *by nature*, a “servant” of God. Indeed, the “primordial nature” (*fitra*) of the human is predisposed to *tawhīd*, that is, to the unity of *Wujūd*. And the human acknowledges her *fitra* through worship and service to others and to creation.²¹⁹

Like humanity, the subtext of sacred revelation is mercy. In fact, the Holy Qur’an is the book of mercy, which is why many *suras* begin with the exaltation of God’s *mercy*. It is of supreme importance that the opening line of the sacred text is: “In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.”²²⁰ Indeed, Chittick speak of the “hermeneutics of mercy” as underlying Ibn ‘Arabī’s approach to exegesis.²²¹

Summarizing Ibn ‘Arabī’s ontology: mercy is the divine attribute tied to the highest principle of *wujūd*, in which all existents participates. The Real *Wujūd* self-discloses itself in delimited ways in creation, and what is primordially self-disclosed is nothing but mercy.

²¹⁷ In Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, 130.

²¹⁸ In Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, 131.

²¹⁹ In Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, 134, 135. A commonly alluded text from the Qur’an is *Maryam* 19:93: “There is nothing in the heavens and the earth that does not come to the All-merciful as a servant.”

²²⁰ *Al-Fatihah* 1.1. Chittick comments, “Classical theologians spent a good deal of time explaining the subtle differences between the meanings of ‘All-merciful’ and ‘Ever-merciful.’ Commonly they said that the All-merciful mercy is universal, and the Ever-merciful mercy is particular. Universal mercy begins with the bestowal of existence. Nothing has a claim on its own being or its own positive qualities. All are the gifts from the Creator. Everything other than God derives its reality — however insubstantial that may be — from the only reality that truly is. Life and livelihood do not come to us by chance, but because of the activity of the All-merciful. Particular mercy is responsive... God’s particular mercy is his response to human effort. He bestows it on the basis of your engagement, commitment and love.” (Chittick, “The Islamic Notion of Mercy,” *HuffPost*)

²²¹ In Chittick, *Ibn ‘Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*, 123 ff.

Creation participates *existentially* in the Breath of the All-Merciful. And this Breath sustains the Divine Names uttered by The Real *Wujūd*, and creation participates *essentially* in these Names. Ibn ‘Arabī’s God-world relation is structured by a dual participation on which existents depend for both their existence and essence. Yet, despite the double-participation schema, existential priority is maintained since the existential grounds the essential, like speaking is made possible by breath.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s Participation in Being/Finding: Some Initial Implications for Wonder

At the end of this chapter, there will be a fuller *comparative* discussion of the three metaphysical schemata and their potential for grounding our notion of wonder. For now, I offer a brief sketch of some implications of Ibn ‘Arabī’s ontological vision for wonder. The first promising aspect of Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics concerns his general ontological “sense” (for lack of a better term), namely, that he joins ontology and epistemology in one concept, i.e. *wujūd*. (As discussed below, Aquinas joins to the two as well, but the connection needs to be deduced.) This has two implications for wonder. First, the phenomenological account of the *experience* of wonder is grounded in the notion that consciousness is always intentional: one is always conscious *at* or conscious *of* something. Wonder, too, is intentional: one wonders *at* or *about* something. In short, the very structure of the phenomenologically understood life-world (*Lebenswelt*) is one where to speak of *being* is to speak of *knowing*, for experience is both being and knowing.

Clearly, Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion of *wujūd* might be the best metaphysical grounding for the world of experience, and for the world of wonder. The human *being* is irreducibly a human *knowing*. In light of *wujūd*, intentionality is not simply an epistemological reality but also an ontological one. Knowledge of the world and of the self are intimately connected. Chittick sums

it up quite nicely, “As for ‘knowing,’ it is simply our *wujūd*, our finding that we find and are found, our presence to our own finding. Such finding underlies all consciousness and explication, just as it underlies all existence.”²²²

Ibn ‘Arabī establishes the link between knowing and being using another etymological argument. As stated above, the Real *Wujūd* self-discloses in the three all-encompassing forms of “cosmos” (‘*ālam*), “knowledge” (‘*ilm*), and “mark” (‘*alāma*), all of which share the same root word. The “cosmos” (‘*ālam*) is “that through which knowledge occurs.”²²³ Again, to be and to know is unified.

The second aspect with potential to ground wonder is related to the first. The inseparability of being and knowing in Ibn ‘Arabī might serve well to describe the epistemic openness of humans that is “ever ready” or open to the experience of wonder that both acts from without and precedes reflection and objectification. Since “nothing determines me from outside...because I am from the start outside myself and open to the world,”²²⁴ such an openness necessitates that, indeed, ontology and epistemology be brought together, which is the very foundation of Ibn ‘Arabī’s entire metaphysics. He further intensifies this unity of being and knowing when articulating the Sufi journey toward the “annihilation” (*fanā*) wherein the “epistemological distance between man and the reality of ‘experience’” is overcome.²²⁵

In a sense, Ibn ‘Arabī’s proposal is a response to a recurring problem for Muslim philosophers in the centuries that preceded him. As Izutsu shows, the persistent question that classical Islamic *falsafa* sought to answer was that of “the unification of the knower and the

²²² Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 921.

²²³ Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 918.

²²⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 483.

²²⁵ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 13–14, 16.

known” (*ittiḥād al-‘ālim wa-al-ma‘lūm*).²²⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī’s Sufi epistemology-as-ontology sought to establish the “absolute transparency between the knower, the known, and knowledge itself.”²²⁷

Third, since being is knowing and knowing is being, Ibn ‘Arabī expands the ways and modes in which one knows, since being—even the delimited being of humans—is manifold and ever in process and flux. He resists the over-objectification or over-rationalization of reality. Working from Neoplatonic assumptions and from that tradition’s desire of “ascent,” he affirms “numerous ‘ways’ to the truth,” which included the “non-propositional” and “non-conceptual,” even those experience lacking “‘cognitive content’ insofar as human reason can comprehend it.”²²⁸ Thus, the school of Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of four possible means toward a deeper knowing beyond reason and logic, namely, “inner witnessing” (*shuhūd*), “tasting” (*dhawq*), “presence” (*ḥudūr*), and “illumination” (*ishrāq*).²²⁹ Interestingly, these modes of knowing emerge from a posture of receptivity and not one of agency. As was established in chapter one, wonder acts upon the subject, pointing to the former.

Fourth, the Real *Wujūd*’s unfolding of existence as mercy has the capacity to ground the experience of wonder and awe. In the previous chapter the definition of wonder included the notions of *preceding* and *exceeding*. Mercy shares in these notions. Mercy-as-being is a one-directional gifting that precedes any creaturely action or response. And, Mercy is, by nature, an excess. It precedes and transcends human action. Could wonder be a residual effect of mercy?

²²⁶ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 9. Izutsu writes, “Whatever may happen to be the object of knowledge, the highest degree of knowledge is always achieved when the knower, the human subject becomes completely unified and identified with the object so much so that there remains no differentiation between the two.” (9) This unitive goal extended to knowledge of existence itself, since, for this “existentialist” school, the highest object of knowledge is “existence” itself. (9-10) Achieving knowledge of this existence, argues Mullā Ṣadrā, must be an intuitive, not demonstrative or logical, journey, one which leads the human knowers to know from within. (10)

²²⁷ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 227.

²²⁸ Rivzi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 225.

²²⁹ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 13.

Participation in Aquinas: Participating in Ipsum Esse (“Being Itself”)

Synopsis

From this close look at Ibn ‘Arabī’s doctrine of participation in *Wujūd*, we now turn to Aquinas, followed by some comparative comments. This section explores Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine of participation. For Aquinas, all that exists participate in *Esse* (“Being” or “Act of Being”). Therefore, “Being” is the “highest principle.” Like Ibn ‘Arabī, he accepts the distinction Ibn Sīnā makes between essence and existence in created things, the only exception being that of the Creator—God— whose “essence is His existence.”²³⁰ This demarcates the most basic distinction in Aquinas’ ontology: There is being by essence, which describes only God, and being by participation, which describes everything other than God.²³¹ Each and every existent or being other than God *must* participate in being, since its essential constitution (its “what-ness”) lacks an inherent power to be (its “that-ness”). Therefore, it depends on another for its act-of-being, which Aquinas calls *esse*.

To understand Aquinas, it is important to name that to which Aquinas is responding. Aquinas’ writings came on the heels of impressive Islamic literary output, a resurgence of philosophical inquiry in both Andalusia and Persia that was subsequently translated into Latin and introduced into the European Christian world east of the Iberian Peninsula. The backdrop to many of Aquinas’ inquiries is dominant Islamic scholarship of the period. This is the subject of the first part of this section. In the second part, I discuss two key ontological features that undergird Aquinas’ use of the doctrine of participation: 1) the essence/existence distinction in created things and the identity of essence and distinction in God alone; and 2) the use of the

²³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.4. One wonders if Ibn Gabirol would have accepted Ibn Sīnā’s ontological distinction. Unfortunately, because the former chronologically precedes the latter, one can only wonder.

²³¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.4; I.4.2.

Aristotelian doctrine of causality. In the third part, I lay out and explain the key features and functions of Aquinas' doctrine of participation. By "function," I mean the ways in which the doctrine of participation preserves and/or works with other key metaphysical concepts crucial to Aquinas' architectonic vision of reality. The fourth section posits that the theological corollary of Being for Aquinas is divine beauty and goodness and beauty. This is based on the ways that the doctrine of participation metaphysically grounds his theology of creation. Hence, in this section, being and goodness (and beauty) are brought together, in a way analogous to the way the matter and desire in Ibn Gabirol and being/knowing and mercy in Ibn 'Arabī, respectively, coalesce. To participate in being—i.e. to exist—is to participate in goodness and beauty. Finally, from this coalescing of being and goodness, the fifth and last subsection names some of the initial implications for wonder in terms of participating in being qua goodness. I begin by discussing the intellectual climate in which Aquinas moved.

To What Aquinas is Responding?

To understand Aquinas, one must see the ways in which he reads and responds to the Islamic intellectual trends of his time, chief among them Andalusian scholarship, though there are a few exceptions (like Ibn Sīnā). In fact, Aquinas is unique among his European Christian contemporaries in that he respects and utilizes the insights of his non-Christian interlocutors. Despite his obvious disagreements with his Abrahamic kin, "his overriding concern in reaching out to other [non-Christian] thinkers was always to learn from them in his search for the truth of the matters at hand."²³² This epistemological priority led to some semblance and accord in their thought. For example, Ibn 'Arabī and Aquinas seem to share the "highest principle" in their

²³² David C. Burrell, "Thomas Aquinas and Islam," *Modern Theology* 20:1 (January 2004): 71–72.

respective ontological structures,²³³ except the latter's lacks the former's dual meaning of *wujūd* as both being and knowing.²³⁴ (Knowing has to be deduced from being in Aquinas' *esse*.) This should come as no surprise since both are working with, and attempting to improve, Avicennian ontology.

In the introductory chapter, I listed the ways in which Aquinas is, in a tangential way, an *Andalusian* scholar, though he never lived on the peninsula. Here I modify that assertion. For while maintaining his Andalusian sensibilities,²³⁵ he nevertheless cannot be reduced to a "reactor" or "respondent" to Islamic thought. Other key factors are at play in his overall thought. First, although he depends greatly on Ibn Rushd as one of the principal commentators on Aristotle, he does not depend on Ibn Rushd's Arabic renditions of Aristotle. Instead, he commissioned Latin translations from the original Greek.²³⁶ Second, there are two specifically *Christian* movements that deeply informed Aquinas' thinking. The first was Dominican monasticism and its kerygmatic activity, which was born in Christian Spain. It was actively present in his native Italy at the time of his theological formation. (This has been discussed in detail in the introductory chapter.) Aquinas' polemical and apologetic approach owes much to

²³³ Ibn 'Arabī and Aquinas are contemporaries. There seems to be no evidence that they knew each other's works, much less that they were interlocutors. The Christian world in Europe was not introduced to Ibn 'Arabī until centuries later, whereas his influence in Islamic thought is vast and enduring. The Christian world did know Ibn 'Arabī's compatriot, Ibn Rushd, who interestingly had less influence in Islamic thought but was highly influential in Christian medieval theology. Cf. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, Harvard Studies in World Religion (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 83; William Chittick, "Ibn Arabi," <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ibn-arabi/>.

²³⁴ Aquinas does bring being and knowing together, but not in his doctrine of participation. He does so in his Trinitarian dogmatics. For Aquinas, God knows the world through the *Logos*, who is of the same essence (*hypostasis*) as God. (Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.45.6; idem., *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk 3, Pt. 2, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), III.98.)

²³⁵ Burrell writes, "With Maimonides and Avicenna his relationship was more akin to that among interlocutors, and especially so with 'Rabbi Moses,' whose extended dialectical conversations with his student Joseph in his *Guide of the Perplexed* closely matched Aquinas' own project: that of using philosophical inquiry to articulate one's received faith, and in the process extending the horizons of that inquiry to include topics unsuspected by those bereft of divine revelation" (Burrell, "Thomas Aquinas and Islam," 71).

²³⁶ Cf. Ivor Thomas, "Introduction," in Aristotle, and William of Moerbeke, *Aristotle's De Anima: In the Version of William of Moerbeke and the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Kenelm Foster and Silvester Humphries, intro. Ivor Thomas. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007).

the Dominican missional goal of converting Jews and Muslims. Another major Christian influence is the rise of the university and its scholasticism. The disputative format of many of his writings reflects this scholastic influence.

One can argue that Aquinas' intellectual activity is framed by the Islamic philosophical milieu and its principal preoccupations. This does not take away from Aquinas' innovative proposals to preceding Islamic questions. This is simply to name that he inherited many of the Islamic questions that he answers in a thoroughly Christian way. What are these "preoccupations" that are in the "air"? Among the many burning questions with which *falsafa* and *kalām* wrestle, two are predominant in the Aquinian corpus. First, Aquinas continues the impassioned search for a proper understanding of *being*. Being may be *the* question that permeates Islamic thought during the Golden Age.²³⁷ The second question among Islamic philosophers involves negotiating between Plato and Aristotle. This makes much of the *falsafa* leading up to Aquinas. Aquinas does not seek reconciliation, as he depends mainly on the Peripatetic approach. Yet, simply to lock him into an Aristotelian approach is an oversimplification. Instead, he works with both, most noticeably with regards to his use of the Platonic doctrine of participation. Instead of reconciling Plato and Aristotle, he "sublates" (*aufheben*) the former's "predicamental participation" into the latter's "transcendental and predicamental participation," as Cornelius Fabro ably demonstrates.²³⁸ To get at Aquinas' genius fully, one must affirm both the ways he continues the Islamic metaphysical conversation and the ways he uniquely parts with it.

²³⁷ Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 5; cf. Peter Coates, *Ibn 'Arabi and Modern Thought: The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously* (Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 2011), 71 ff.

²³⁸ Cornelio Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 27.3 (1974): 449–91. Fabro writes, "The Thomistic synthesis is absolutely original: it accepts the metaphysical nucleus of Platonic transcendence (the notion of creation, the composition of *esse* and *essence*, the doctrine of analogy) and welds it to the act of Aristotelian immanence (the unity of the substantial form, the intellective soul as substantial form of the body, the doctrine of abstract)." (468–69)

Ontological Preliminaries for the Doctrine of Participation

This section frames the Aquinian doctrine of participation in the following steps: First, it offers some necessary ontological grounding to the doctrine of participation, particularly two linchpin principles: 1) the distinction between essence and *esse* in the created order and their unification in God; and, 2) the doctrine of causality in the theology of creation. These features of the Aquinian structure of being are crucial for comprehending the role that participation plays in his ontological priority of being and his vision of God as the “Necessary Being.”²³⁹

Esse/Essence Distinction

For Aquinas, the most fundamental ontological principles are essence and existence, with existence—or *esse*—having ontological primacy. Moreover, *esse* and essence are distinct and not to be conflated in the created order, a monumental insight he borrows from Ibn Sīnā and expands. This distinction is the subtext for the doctrine of participation. To comprehend participation rightly, the *esse*/essence distinction must be explicated. This is the most foundational feature of Aquinas’ ontology. Thus, a treatment of any other ontological features rests on properly grasping this bedrock notion.

The two primordial questions that one can ask regarding any given thing are: “What is it?” and “*Is it?*” The former is an essential question, that is, concerning essence; and the latter, one concerning existence. The Avicennian legacy in metaphysics was to split the two questions, recognizing that the quiddity of a thing (its “what-ness”) does not, *in or of itself*, ensure that thing will actually *be*. Aquinas takes this ontological discovery in new direction, but it is original to Ibn Sīnā, who first formulated both “the distinction between essence and existence and the

²³⁹ David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 94–95.

ontological distinction between contingent and necessary being.”²⁴⁰ European/Western readers, both Muslim and Christian, understood Ibn Sīnā as saying existence was *accidentally* applied to the essence of created things. Existence, they wrongly concluded, is an accident in the Avicennian schema, with the division being between “essential being, or being per se... and accidental or derivative being.”²⁴¹ Some scholars contend that European interpreters misunderstood Ibn Sīnā in that for him “accidentality” of existence was a solely grammatical designation, not an ontological one.²⁴² Yet, what is important here is to name Aquinas’ reception of the Persian master, however wrong it was, and the former’s response to this misinterpretation. In some ways, Aquinas’ misstep is understandable, since he receives a Latinized “Avicenna”²⁴³ through the Andalusian Ibn Rushd’s own misreading of the Ibn Sīnā.

Aquinas rebuts and goes beyond “Avicenna.” Like Ibn Sīnā, he distinguishes between *esse* and essence, but unlike “Avicenna” he moves *esse* beyond the category of accident and

²⁴⁰ Hossein Ziai, “Islamic Philosophy (*Falsafa*),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 65; cf. Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 151–57.

²⁴¹ Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 151.

²⁴² Toshihiko Izutsu corrects medieval misreadings of Ibn Sīnā. (Cf. Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, 5–8) The “accidentality of existence” is first attributed to Ibn Sīnā by Ibn Rushd, and then by Aquinas, though both were wrong in attributing this idea to Ibn Sīnā. This scarred Ibn Sīnā’s legacy, within both Muslim and Christian intellectual traditions (5–6). Yet, as Izutsu makes clear, existence as “accident” was not an ontological designation, but a linguistic/grammatical one. “It is on this level and on this level only, that Avicenna speaks of existence being an ‘accident’ of essence.” (6) Ibn Sīnā, recognizing the possibility of being misunderstood, was adamant in qualifying that “existence” should not be put in the same categories as other accidents like color and weight. For “existence is a very peculiar and unique kind of accident.” But, unfortunately for Ibn Sīnā, he never clarifies “the structure of the extramental, objective reality which is found beyond what is meant by the logical proposition.” (7) What Ibn Sīnā intends regarding extramental reality, argues Izutsu, is the converse of his grammatical analysis. Izutsu writes, “For the realm of the external reality there is, to begin with, no self-subsistent substance called table, nor is there a real ‘accident’ called ‘existence’ to come to inhere in the substance.” (8) To be clear, the extramental world is real for this school of philosophers. They are contending that the existential structure does not match the grammatical one. “The only point they want to make is that the *structure* of external reality which corresponds to this proposition is totally different from what is normally suggested by the *form* of the proposition” (8; emphasis added). Within the *structure* of external reality, the table is the “accident,” a “modification” of the reality of existence, with is the “real subject” (8).

²⁴³ The Latinized form of Ibn Sīnā in quotations (i.e. “Avicenna”) is used here with the intention of distinguishing the authentic Ibn Sīnā from the Western distortion from Islamic Andalusia and Christian Europe.

indeed beyond all categorization. In contrast to “Avicenna’s” essentialist metaphysics, Aquinas’ *esse* is all-encompassing and universal, and therefore has primacy in his metaphysics. It is existence that actualizes essence, and not the other way around. Gilson explains, “*Esse* (to be) does not come from *essentia*, but *essentia* comes from *esse*.”²⁴⁴ *Esse* is “the ontological principle of actuality and perfection in all things.”²⁴⁵ It is “the first perfection and the act of all acts.”²⁴⁶ After all, before one can inquire about the quiddity of a thing, the thing must *exist*. Later, I now turn to the doctrine of causality, the second preliminary ontological notion which informs Aquinas’ doctrine of participation.

Causality and Creation

The Aristotelian doctrine of causality is indispensable for Aquinian metaphysics generally, and specifically for how he defines creation as a theological concept. In this section, I discuss two key aspects of Aristotle’s doctrine of causality that are critical for understanding participation: the epistemological import of causality, and the Aristotelian categories of causality in Aquinas. Let us look at each in turn.

In *Posterior Analytics* and *Physics*, Aristotle asserts that “proper knowledge” of a thing requires that one know its cause.²⁴⁷ In short, to know *reality* is to know *causality*. Aquinas affirms this premise and extends it to the knowledge of God, with some qualifications. Whereas one can know a thing’s essence, its causes, and its effects, one cannot know God’s essence, and

²⁴⁴ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 38.

²⁴⁵ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 171.

²⁴⁶ Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy,” 467.

²⁴⁷ In Andrea Falcon, “Aristotle on Causality,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/aristotle-causality/>, accessed August 10, 2018. (Cf. *Posterior Analytics*, 71 b 9–11; 94 a 20; *Physics* 194 b 17–20)

God is the uncaused Cause of all being,²⁴⁸ that is, She is the first efficient cause.²⁴⁹ One can know God only by Her effects, and can deduce limited knowledge of God from said effects. Aquinas writes, “Although we cannot know in what consists the essence of God, nevertheless in this science [i.e. theology] we make use of His effects, either of nature or of grace.”²⁵⁰ One deduces that God is *esse subsistens* by first affirming the ontological priority of existence (*esse*), and then asking the logical causal questions as to how things come to be. *Proper* knowledge of all reality, including God as the source of reality, necessitates that one know causes and effects.

The second feature of causality that needs discussion here is Aristotle’s categories of causes, and how Aquinas deploys them in his theology of creation. There are four kinds of causes: material, formal, efficient, and final.²⁵¹ To illustrate them he uses the example of an artisan making a bronze statue. Andrea Falcon summarizes it well.²⁵² The material cause is “that out of which” the statue is made: bronze. The formal cause is the “form” or the “account of what-it-is-to be”: a statue. The efficient cause is “the primary source of the change or rest,” or that which makes the bronze statue: the artisan and her craft. And the final cause is “the end, that for the sake of which a thing is done”: for example, to admire or to worship the statue as an idol.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.7.

²⁴⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.2.3.

²⁵⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.1.7. Aquinas is using the term “science” in the medieval sense of *scientia*, as in knowledge. In this sentence, he means the *scientia* of theology or “sacred doctrine.” By “nature,” he means knowledge of God through Her creative acts (i.e. creation); by “grace,” he means knowledge of God through Her saving acts (i.e. revelation, salvation).

²⁵¹ Falcon, “Aristotle on Causality,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-causality/>; cf. Aristotle, *Physics* II.3 and *Metaphysics* V.2.

²⁵² Falcon, “Aristotle on Causality,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

²⁵³ Cf. Aquinas, “On the Principles of Nature,” §4-5, in *Selected Writings*, ed. & trans. Ralph McInerny (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 25–27.

Using this fourfold typology, Aquinas then explains how God as Being-Itself *causes* all things to be—or theologically speaking, how She *creates*. “Creation” is a rich and technical term for Aquinas, defined in such a way that it can apply only to God. Aquinas defines “creation” as “the emanation of all being from the universal cause, which is God.”²⁵⁴ Consequently, humans cannot *create*.²⁵⁵ Aquinas insists: “Therefore an infinite power is required to create: so that the creative power cannot be communicated to a creature.”²⁵⁶ Humans can produce, fabricate, and make, but not create.

This emanation, which “we designate by the name of creation,”²⁵⁷ is different from the multi-tiered emanationist schemes circulating in Jewish, Islamic, and Christian intellectual thought, which seek to reconcile the one-to-many problems with either stacked intermediaries, doctrines of *gradual* creation, or by doctrines of creation other than *ex nihilo*.²⁵⁸ Since Aquinas’ use of “emanation” is particular, some qualifiers are needed here.

First, “emanation” of being is not actualized by intermediaries, but it is the direct and immediate action of God. Affirming God as *creator* means affirming divine providence not just universally *over* the *whole* of creation, but also intimately *in* each created thing, receiving life directly and in an *unmediated* way from God—no intermediary managers needed. Aquinas declares, “Everything falls under divine providence, not merely in its universality but in its

²⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.45.1; cf. Anselm K. Min, “Creation from the Perspective of Participation and the Role of Form as the Principle of the Unity and Order of Being,” lecture, The Theology of Thomas Aquinas course for Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, Sept. 9, 2014.

²⁵⁵ This is a challenge to recent discussion, among certain theological circles, of humans as “created co-creators.” Cf.: Philip J. Hefner, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture, and Religion*. Theology and the Sciences (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 23 ff.

²⁵⁶ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, III.4.

²⁵⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.45.1.

²⁵⁸ Cf. David Sedley, *Creationism and Its Critics in Antiquity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009). Although the following anthology mostly discusses Plotinus, several of its authors speak to the use of causality in doctrines of creation: Anna Marmodoro, ed., *Causation and Creation in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

particularity.”²⁵⁹ Creation is the whole of existence, in its “good” diversity it is a direct and unmediated act of God.²⁶⁰ A detractor may argue that the Christian affirmation of the *logos* (λογος) as that through which God creates, is an intermediary, but a properly Trinitarian understanding of *logos* refutes that argument.

Second, creation is not gradual process of divine activity. God does not work in sequential steps from partial being of an entity to an eventual full being of an entity. Rather, creation is “the emanation of *the whole being* from a universal cause.”²⁶¹ As Aquinas declares in *De Potentia*, “[B]y his action he produces the whole subsistent being, without anything having existed before.”²⁶² The act of creation is not “the building up of a composite thing from pre-existing principles;” instead, the composite being is “brought into being at the same time with all its principles.”²⁶³ Creation is not incomplete existence that becomes more complete over time,²⁶⁴ but rather is complete “all at once.”

Creation therefore includes the creation of matter. This is a rather revolutionary affirmation in light of the intellectual trends in Aquinas’ time among Jews, Muslims, and

²⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.22.2. This is a refutation of Ibn Sīnā’s notion that God does not know particulars, only universals, a proposal that was adamantly rejected in Islamic circles. Cf. Ghazzālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 2nd ed., trans. Michael E. Marmura, Islamic Translation Series (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 125–30; cf. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 94–95.

²⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.47.1

²⁶¹ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 126.

²⁶² Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, III.1.

²⁶³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.45.4; cf. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 139; Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 121, 123.

²⁶⁴ In light of modern evolutionary theory, a clarification is needed here. Aquinas’ doctrine of creation as the giving of existence “all at once” is entirely compatible with modern scientific theory of evolution. Were Aquinas thinking through the theory of evolution today, he would categorize evolution under the notion of “motion” and “change.” Creation is neither change nor movement, for it does not have a fixed departure point, since God creates *ex nihilo*, beyond time. Creation is the giving *fully* of existence to all existents. (Cf. Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 120; Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 126) Hence, single-cell organisms are *fully* existent. In other words, they are not partially existing, becoming more and more existing as they evolve into more complex beings. All beings along the great chain of evolution, those now extinct and those persevering still, have been and are *fully* existing.

Christians. It was a difficult proposition for many to affirm that the completely immaterial God is the source of matter. Some follow Aristotle without revision and assert that God works with an eternal “prime matter” and that creation is simply the right dividing and ordering of that matter.²⁶⁵

Aquinas breaks with the classical Aristotelian and Neoplatonist traditions²⁶⁶ and credits God with creating prime matter—or first material cause.²⁶⁷ Again, to say that God is material cause is a grand claim, since God has no matter in Her being, which at face value violates the rule of *omne agents agit sibi simile*.²⁶⁸ For logically, the immaterial cannot generate the material.²⁶⁹ Aquinas reconciles this by introducing the notion of omnipotence. God is all-powerful precisely because She can create what which is not-Her. In other words, since the gap between being and non-being is “infinitely apart,” creation requires “an infinite power” that “operate[s] at an infinite distance.”²⁷⁰ Therefore, because of God’s infinite power, one can affirm that “primary matter is from Him.”²⁷¹

²⁶⁵ Cf. Graham J. McAleer, “Augustinian Interpretations of Averroes with Respect to the Status of Prime Matter,” *The Modern Schoolman* 73, no. 2 (1996): 159-72; Harry Austryn Wolfson, “Plato’s Pre-existent Matter in Patristic Philosophy,” in *The Classical Tradition: Literary and Historical Studies in Honor of Harry Caplan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 409–20; idem., “The Problem of the Origin of Matter in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Its Analogy to the Modern Problem of the Origin of Life,” in *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, Vol. 2, ed. Isadore Twersky and George H. Williams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 491–96; Ahuva Gaziel, “Spontaneous Generation in Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Theology,” *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 34, no. 3 (2012): 461-79; Sarah Pessin, Solomon Ibn Gabirol [Avicebron], Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, I.7, In *The Internet Classics Archive* (1994–2009), trans. R. P. Hardie & R. K. Gaye, ed. Daniel C. Stevenson, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.1.i.html>, accessed on December 20, 2014; Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, §48–52.

²⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.44.2.

²⁶⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.3.4; cf. Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 113.

²⁶⁹ Aquinas, *De Potentia*, 3.8, in *Selected Philosophical Writings*, 311. Aquinas states, “an agent must actually be what the object of its activity potentially is.”

²⁷⁰ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, III.4.

²⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.44.4. Interestingly, Aquinas distances God from created existence when it comes to the latter’s formal, not material, constitution. God is the material cause of existence, but not its formal cause. God as creator is responsible for bringing about forms as well. Yet, She is not the *formal* cause, for this would lead to a pantheism that equates creaturely essence with divine essence. God is the *exemplar* cause, for She conceives of all forms in Her mind (a creative capacity appropriated to the Son)—what te Velde calls “extrinsic

Lastly, since creation is not actualized by intermediaries nor by gradual succession, the Christian affirmation has been that God creates *ex nihilo*. Intermediation and gradation assume, respectively, either a pre-existing agent (other than God) or pre-existing “stuff.” Yet, neither of these are posited in Aquinas’ doctrine of creation. To affirm *ex nihilo* is to affirm as “only” and “first” creator, that is, first and only universal and efficient cause of being.²⁷²

By “only,” Aquinas affirms God to be the *universal* cause of being, since the whole of creation is brought into being by one source, God. “Universal” must be understood in light of the Aristotelian fourfold typology of causality. For the philosopher and his followers, the four types are: material, formal, efficient, and final.²⁷³ By employing the term “universal,” Aquinas asserts that God is *prior* to all subsequent material, efficient, and final cause, and therefore the first cause of all said causes.²⁷⁴

By “first,” Aquinas means *ontologically*, not *temporally*, since God is outside time and creates time. God as ontologically prior matters to Aquinas, especially in light of the ancient philosophical traditions that posited the universe as eternal, without a beginning. Aquinas admits

formal cause.” In the words of Pseudo-Dionysius, “we call exemplars the substantial reasons of all things preexisting individually in the mind of God.” In this qualified sense God is said to be the cause of the totality of being in beings composed essentially of matter and form. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.3.8; te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 125–126. Also see: Pseudo-Dionysius, *De Trinitate*, c. 2, in Cornelio Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation,” *Review of Metaphysics*, 27:3 (March 1974): 276.)

²⁷² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.2.3; 1.3.1; 1.3.4.; 1.105.5.

²⁷³ Aquinas (and Aristotle before him) illustrates the four causes with his example of the bronze idol. The material cause is “that out of which,” e.g., the *bronze* out of which a statue is made. Matter is only potential, actualized by form. The formal cause is, then, the *shape* of the bronze statue, as A. Falcon puts it, “the account of what-it-is-to-be.” The efficient cause agent or source of the change, in this case, the *sculptor* of the bronze idol. The final cause is the purpose or function for which a thing is made—e.g. bronze idol made to *generate worship*, or for the *sculptor’s gratification*, etc. See, Aquinas, “On the Principles of Nature,” §4–5, in *Selected Writings*, ed. & trans. Ralph McInerney (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 25–27; and, Falcon, “Aristotle on Causality”, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/aristotle-causality/>.

²⁷⁴ Aquinas, “On the Principles of Nature,” §4, in *Selected Writings*, 26; Aquinas, *In Aristotelis Librum Peri Hermeneias* (1.14), in *Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. & trans. Timothy S. McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 283.

that Christian theology accepts *creation ex nihilo* on faith alone,²⁷⁵ for it cannot be demonstrated rationally. Yet, speculates Aquinas, *even if universe is eternal*, God is nevertheless *ontologically* first.²⁷⁶

That God's creative acts are ontologically first, furthermore, implies that creation is not simply something that occurred "in the beginning"²⁷⁷ of time, for God as *efficient* cause is *continually* causing the totality of being.²⁷⁸ Outside of being, there is only non-being, that is, nothing.²⁷⁹ God's efficient causality is ongoing. For creation to exist, the efficient cause (i.e. God) must be *ontologically* prior, that is to say, always efficiently causing existence. Creation cannot remain existent on the residue of the effect alone. In terms of creation, the notion that a lingering effect can sustain being and keep it from slipping back to non-being is a metaphysical absurdity.²⁸⁰ The efficient cause is infinitely causing or creating being out of nonbeing: this is the ontological meaning of *creatio ex nihilo*.

The Particularities of Aquinas's Doctrine of Participation

Now that the doctrine of creation has been laid out clearly, the doctrine of participation can come into full view, since the latter is the *metaphysical* linchpin of *theological* doctrine of creation. I have articulated the distinction of *esse* and essence in created beings and their oneness in the divine being as a principal ontological tenet. The distinction between composite beings and simple being (i.e. God) is demarcated by the concept of participation: God owns Her

²⁷⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.46.2. He admits, "By faith alone do we hold, and by no demonstration can it be proved, that the world did not always exist..."

²⁷⁶ Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 147–48.

²⁷⁷ Genesis 1:1.

²⁷⁸ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 139.

²⁷⁹ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 139; Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 120–21; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 71.

²⁸⁰ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, V.1.

own existence and therefore is *ipsum esse per se subsistens*²⁸¹; by contrast, creatures do not own their own existence and therefore must “partake” from an external source for their existence.

Based on the ontological givens in Aquinas’ metaphysics, participation can be defined as having the following four aspects: 1) as the partaking of *esse* by finite beings, 2) from the emanation from Being-Itself, 3) that creatively brings about a multiplicity of beings, 4) without dividing or exhausting Being-itself.²⁸² This four-part participation moves within created existence, partaking in existence in a way limited by its essence and concluded with Being-Itself as the perfection of being. In doing so, the definition includes lower principles, a higher principle, and the relation of the former to the latter. Each part of the definition is necessary.

Part 1—No creature can actualize its own existence and must therefore “partake” of existence from elsewhere. Meaning, there is nothing in their essence that *ensures* that they will be. So, to be human does not guarantee that that human will exist. Existence is not intrinsic to finite essences, but extrinsic to them.

Part 2—Participation relates that which does not exist by its own essence to that which does, namely Being-itself. For only a being whose essence is *to-be* can impart being to other beings. And since effect embodies part of the essence of the cause, and since God’s essence is Her existence, the effect is being itself. Aquinas declares, “Since God is being itself by His own essence, created things must be His proper effect.”²⁸³

²⁸¹ Anselm K. Min, Lecture delivered for Theology of Thomas Aquinas course, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA, September 22, 2014.

²⁸² Though they did not define participation as I do here, two scholars were specially insightful for the structure of my definition: Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 139–42; and, W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 89–101.

²⁸³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1.8.1.

Part 3—Yet beings by participation do not receive or enter into the fullest of Being-Itself. Rather, each created existent participates in existence in a way limited by its essence. As Cornelio Fabro highlights, this is precisely what Aquinas meant by participation, namely, “taking a part” or as John Caputo translates it, “grasping a part.”²⁸⁴ Aquinas writes, “When something receives a part of what belongs to another fully, it is said to participate in it.”²⁸⁵ But he qualifies this participation noting that, “[W]hatever is participated in is determined by the mode of the participant, and is thus possessed in a partial way and not according to every mode of perfection.”²⁸⁶ Participation therefore makes sense of the diversity of beings from one source, Being-Itself, by upholding the composite make-up for creatures with an intrinsic form and an *esse* informed by “the mode of the participant.” As Caputo posits, form contracts *esse* to a mode of *esse* because the composite subject “participates in *esse* within the limits which the form itself allows.”²⁸⁷ The form, adds Te Velde, “determines” the being in which an entity participates.²⁸⁸

Part 4—Lastly, participation makes sense of the diversity of beings from one source, Being-Itself, *without dividing or diminishing Being-Itself*. In fact, the converse occurs. Instead of Being-Itself being diminished by the participating being, finite beings participate in infinite being, and thus, each being is “infinite in a finite way.”²⁸⁹ The schema of participation maintains the perfection “in a total and unrestricted manner” and rightly identifies the “participant subject” as the recipient of “*the same perfection* in some partial or restricted way.”²⁹⁰ This directionality,

²⁸⁴ Cornelius Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy,” 453, 472; cf. John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 133.

²⁸⁵ In Fabro, “The Intensive Hermeneutics” 472. In Aquinas, *An Exposition of the on the Hebdomads of Boethius*, intro. and trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan, Thomas Aquinas in Translation (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 1.2, n. 24.

²⁸⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.32.

²⁸⁷ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 134.

²⁸⁸ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 141.

²⁸⁹ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 141.

²⁹⁰ Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics*, 93.

argues Caputo, avoids the misunderstanding of participation in Being-Itself as “taking apart” and instead reminds us that it “partakes.” Yet “*Esse* does not participate in anything beyond itself.”²⁹¹ God does not *have* Being, but *is* Being.

Theological Import: Participating in Esse as “Good”

Like Ibn Gabirol and Ibn ‘Arabī, Aquinas appropriates a divine attribute to the “highest principle” in which existents participate. Since participation is the *metaphysical* explication for the *theological* doctrine of creation, the divine attribute appropriated to creation can duly be applied to participation as well. As Cornelio Fabro writes, “*Esse* is the act that constitutes the proper terminus of transcendent causality (creation, conservation) and it is by virtue of this direct causality of *esse* that God operates immediately in every agent.”²⁹² The participating of *esse* is the meaning of creation.

What then is the divine attribute appropriated to creation? For Aquinas, the notion of goodness is what is appropriated both to God *as creator*, and to creation as participating in *Esse*. In other words, goodness is applied to God’s creative act and to the result of that creative act. As Fabro states, “[I]n Thomistic speculation the notion of participation expresses the ultimate point of reference both from the static viewpoint of the creature’s structure and from the dynamic viewpoint of its dependence on God.”²⁹³ Creation is not a necessary act of God, but a *good* act of God.

Appropriating a specific divine attribute requires some explanation. In one sense, all the divine attributes can be applied to God’s creative act. Because God is simple being,²⁹⁴ all the

²⁹¹ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 132.

²⁹² Fabro, “Intensive Hermeneutics,” 474.

²⁹³ Fabro, “Intensive Hermeneutics,” 469.

²⁹⁴ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.1–8.

divine attributes are one and the same in God.²⁹⁵ Divine simplicity asserts that to say “God is” and to say “God is just” or “God is beautiful” are synonymous. The difference is from the human point of view, when, through reason, one distinguishes goodness and justice. The distinction between the divine names is a *rational* one, not a *real* one.²⁹⁶

Thus, goodness is appropriated both to God’s creative activity and to creation as the “result” of that creative activity. Goodness denotes God’s willing the cosmos into being. As stated in the previous paragraph, all the divine attributes are indistinguishable from the divine essence, a doctrine known as divine simplicity. Appropriating goodness is then a rational distinction.

So why goodness? Goodness is rationally applied to creation because of the nature of goodness itself. According to Aquinas, goodness is essentially self-communicating: it gives and is generous by nature. Creation emanates out of “the manifestation of God’s abundant goodness,”²⁹⁷ whose nature it is to diffuse itself beyond itself. This does not mean, stresses Gilson, that God was constrained by His goodness to create. Nor is divine goodness increased by God creating beings outside Himself, nor diminished by creation ceasing to be.²⁹⁸ What goodness posits, according to Aquinas, is wholly positive, in that God is a perfect agent and thus acts without need. He avers,

To act from need belongs only to an imperfect agent, which by its nature is both agent and patient. But this does not belong to God, and therefore He alone is the most perfectly liberal giver, because He does not act for His own profit, but only for His own goodness.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.4.

²⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.4.

²⁹⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, V.3.

²⁹⁸ Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), 120–29. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.97–98; idem., *On the Power of God*, VII.10.

²⁹⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.44.4.

In *Summa Theologica*, “the Good” intentionally precedes other Divine “names,” like those of eternity and omniscience.³⁰⁰ Creation is created *by* the Good and *for* the Good.

In addition to God being “good” in creating, creation duly is said to be “good”³⁰¹ because it participates in Goodness-Itself in the same way that creation has being because it participates in Being-Itself, since Being and Goodness are the same in the simple, divine essence. God is the “the cause” of the “being, goodness, and every other perfection” of all things.³⁰² And God is the “end” of all things in that all things strive for the good. Aquinas argues that “the divine goodness is the end of all things” because in “communicating” Her goodness in creation, each thing is created with the intent of “acquir[ing] its own perfection, which is the likeness of the divine perfection and goodness.”³⁰³

Appropriating goodness to creation, Aquinas makes sense of “the one and the many.” Not only is each substance good by virtue of its being, also, all things together in their diversity more fully communicate God’s goodness. The diversity of things is an expression of the manifold goodness of God overflowing into God’s creation. Here, I quote Aquinas at length:

Now created things all fall short of the full goodness of God, so, in order that things may reflect that goodness more perfectly, there had to be a variety of things, so that *what one thing couldn’t express perfectly could be more perfectly expressed in various ways by a variety of things*. For human beings too, when they can’t express the idea in their minds in one word, resort to many different ones that express the idea in different ways. And this also draws attention to how great God’s perfection is: for the perfect goodness that exists one and unbroken in God can exist in creatures only in a multitude of fragmented ways.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5–14.

³⁰¹ Cf. Genesis 1:31.

³⁰² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.2.3.

³⁰³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.44.4.

³⁰⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.97–98. (Italics added for emphasis.)

The power of Aquinas' words here is their ability simultaneously to affirm the dialectics of diversity-unity and of particularity-universality in creation. Elsewhere Aquinas writes, "Everything falls under divine providence, not merely in its universality but in its particularity."³⁰⁵ All other *created* things are "fragmented ways" in which goodness is made manifest. A fuller expression of goodness is only possible when the "variety of things," *each on its own* and *all together*, reflect God's goodness.

In giving being to all that is by way of participation, God also gives to participants Her perfections, including goodness as both their cause and end of all things. Aquinas affirms "five perfections": being, unity, truth, goodness, and beauty. Dubbed as the "doctrine of transcendentals" by later readers of Aquinas,³⁰⁶ each perfection is something absolutely universal that is beyond genera and species [hence, 'transcendental'], inherent in all beings because it is "co-extensive" with being,³⁰⁷ that is, "included in being, unitedly and indistinctly."³⁰⁸ That is to say, they derive and are contained in the notion of being. Therefore, the transcendentals are modalities of being that are applicable to all beings, but they neither "add anything" to being in the real order, nor are they mere tautology. In its *being* (the first perfection), each thing is said to be one, true, good, and beautiful insofar as they participate in the Divine Unity, Truth, Good, and Beauty—in short, insofar as they participate in Divine *Esse*.

³⁰⁵ *Summa Theologica* 1.22.2.

³⁰⁶ In his own writings, Aquinas never used the term "transcendentals" to speak of these "perfections" of beings. Moreover, the proposition that certain notions are co-extensive with being can be found as early as Parmenides, though Albert the Great, Aquinas' teacher, developed some ideas regarding perfections that are co-extensive with being. See: Wouter Goris and Jan Aertsen, "Medieval Theories of Transcendentals," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/transcendentals-medieval/>, accessed on September 6, 2018.

³⁰⁷ Goris and Aertsen, "Medieval Theories of Transcendentals," <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/transcendentals-medieval/>.

³⁰⁸ Goris and Aertsen, "Medieval Theories of Transcendentals," <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/transcendentals-medieval/>.

Of course, Aquinas carefully parses what he means by these transcendentals, since it becomes complicated when one tries to explain or define each name's relation to being. Aquinas states that each transcendental "adds 'something' to being," but only rationally and not really.³⁰⁹ Thus, he speaks of them in the qualified sense of modality, so as not to constitute a being's essence. This qualified, "modal" sense is described in different ways, depending on each name. Unity adds only negation, in that a substance is "one" in its indivisibility. The name "one," then, is most closely tied to being, and is thus "convertible" with being.³¹⁰ As transcendental, truth affirms the basic aptness of all things to be understood and known.³¹¹ That is to say, truth assumes a basic, intelligible structure of reality, which can be known. As transcendentals, goodness and beauty share the most in common. Both are participatory names. All beings, in participating in being, participate in divine beauty and goodness. Aquinas asserts, "An essence is called good in the same way as it is called a being. Hence, just as it has *esse* by participation, so it is good by participation."³¹² The *being* of things is both good and beautiful.

Since both beauty and goodness, as transcendentals, are participatory, some additional commentary is necessary here. Rationally speaking, goodness accentuates the efficient and final cause of all being. To understand the efficacy of goodness, one must preserve an important distinction regarding what is said of goodness and being in reality and what is said of these rationally. As stated above, being and goodness are the same in reality but different in idea.³¹³

³⁰⁹ Thomas Aquinas and James F. Anderson, *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Pub, 1997), 45.

³¹⁰ The being as being is wholly one, thus distinguishing it from other beings. Of course, Aquinas carefully parses out the various definitions for "one," asserting that the numerical "one" is a quantitative accident, not a transcendental.

³¹¹ Anselm K. Min, Lecture delivered in Theology of Thomas Aquinas course, Claremont Graduate University, September 22, 2014.

³¹² In Fabro, "Intensive Hermeneutics," 474.

³¹³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.1.

As a consequence, the question of precedence—that is, whether being precedes goodness, or vice versa—differs between reality and intellection, and consequently “are not predicated of a thing absolutely in the same way.”³¹⁴ In the intellect, being precedes goodness since “being is the proper object of the intellect.”³¹⁵ Yet, in reality, i.e. in the act of creation, goodness precedes being, since it is out of divine goodness that things come to be. Goodness is the end or final cause, which “is first among causes, since an agent does not act except for some end.” The end is “the cause of causes.” Thus in reality, goodness precedes being “among the names signifying the divine causality.”³¹⁶ Quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas concludes “that ‘goodness extends to non-existence.’”³¹⁷

Since good is what is desired, good speaks to the final cause or end of things. That is to say, the good are not just what things are, but what things strive toward. Thus, goodness is tied to “appetite” for the good,³¹⁸ and this appetite, when striving for the good, perfects beings in that striving. Thus, there is an inherent desire for the good in all things. It is important to note here the striking resonance with Ibn Gabirol, who, as shown above, also places desire at the heart of existence.

Beauty is related to goodness. In fact, Aquinas posits that they are the same “in subject” (i.e. both found in form) and are only different “in notion.” Whereas the good is recognized by

³¹⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.1.

³¹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.2.

³¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.2.

³¹⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.2; quoting Pseudo-Dionysius, *On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*, V.1. The full quotation from Pseudo-Dionysius is: “For the Name of ‘Good’ revealing all the emanations of the universal Cause, extends both to the things which are, and to the things which are not, and is beyond both categories.” Elsewhere Pseudo-Dionysius writes, “[S]o far as their existence is concerned, they possess it from the Good.” And, “Thus the first gift which the Absolute and Transcendent Goodness bestows is that of mere Existence, and so It derives its first title from the chiefest of the participations in Its Being. From It and in It are very Being and the Principles of the world, and the world which springs from them and all things that in any way continue in existence.” (*On the Divine Names*, IV.24, V.6.)

³¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.2.

desire, beauty can only be apprehended by the intellect. Beauty is tied to the orderliness of things, which themselves are “good.”³¹⁹ Beauty requires the integrity and right proportion of creation; beauty names the orderliness and splendor of the structure of existence. Aquinas declares, “[T]here is an order among things.”³²⁰ Moreover, order is a relation: “[I]n things themselves there be an order and this order is a kind of relation.”³²¹ Beauty is goodness-in-relation. Beauty is the relation of *all parts of creation* to the Creator,³²² affirming both the particularity of each existent and the universality of all existence.³²³ In a deep way, beauty is relationality of the good creation, or the-good-in-relation. It is not insignificant that God calls creation “very good” only after God completes the work on the sixth day and looks at “*everything* that he had made.”³²⁴ To participate in beauty is to participate in goodness *within this ordered universe*.

Aquinas’ Participation in Esse: Some Initial Implications for Wonder

The end of this chapter has a fuller, comparative discussion of the three metaphysical schemata and their potential for grounding our notion of wonder. For now, here is a brief sketch of some implications of Aquinas’ ontological vision for wonder. Three features are worth discussing here: 1) participation in being as participating in God’s “liberal” (i.e. generous) gift; 2) related to this, the being and knowing of goodness and beauty; and, 3) the ontological dialectic of the particularity and universality of being.

³¹⁹ Cf. Genesis 1:4–25.

³²⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.97; cf. *Summa Theologica*, I.103.6.

³²¹ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, VII.9.

³²² Anselm K. Min, Lecture delivered in Theology of Thomas Aquinas course, Claremont Graduate University, September 22, 2014.

³²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.22.2. In *On the Power of God*, he hints at this orderliness as part of what God gives in emanating existence: “It pertains to the liberality of a giver not only that he give quickly [i.e. being to composite beings ‘all at once’], but also that he give *ordinately* and each gift at a suitable time” (IV.1; italics added for emphasis).

³²⁴ Genesis 1:31. (Italics added for emphasis.)

Regarding the first of these, with his doctrine of creation, in which the notion of participation is central, Aquinas seeks to define God's creative action as entirely free from necessity or obligation. God does not *need* to create; God freely creates, out of Her self-communicating goodness. Freely and graciously, God wills creation into being. In a way, the adjectives "free" and "gracious" are redundant with regards to creation since what God wills is "to share his goodness with creatures."³²⁵ Aquinas is careful not to say that God is bound by Her goodness to create. He clarifies, "God must love his own goodness, but from this it does not follow *necessarily* that creatures must exist to express it, since God's goodness is perfect without that."³²⁶

Aquinas typically uses one specific term to name this totally free will of God to create: liberality. A more commonplace term today is generosity. In creating, God is perfect liberality or generosity, without need. Alluding to Ibn Sīnā, Aquinas declares that the act of creation is a "supremely liberal" act.³²⁷ Aquinas (and Ibn Sīnā with him³²⁸) posits a relationship between generosity and goodness: the one who gives without need exemplifies "liberality" and the effect or result of that generosity is deemed good *precisely because of that generosity*. "Because God is good, we are." It is the essence of the good to give excessively. Goodness is "diffusive of its existence."³²⁹

³²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.97.

³²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.97.

³²⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, VII.10. Here, Aquinas is alluding to Ibn Sīnā: "...as Avicenna says." (cf. Ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, VIII.7)

³²⁸ Ibn Sīnā writes, "Liberality, then, is the bestowal of perfection on one who, in all respects, is in no need of a benefit. Thus, this meaning would be a good in relation to the recipient and, in relation to the agent, liberality. Every bestowal of perfection would be a good in relation to the recipient, regardless of whether or not it is accomplished by recompense; but [it] would not be liberality in relation to the agent unless there is no recompense. This, then, is the explanation of the reality of the [beneficial] good and of liberality." (Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, VI.5.48)

³²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.4.

In a theological sense, this “excess,” this “liberality” that saturates created reality accounts for the “excess” of wonder. The experience of wonder, as defined in Chapter 1, speaks of “excess,” of things or events saturating and overwhelming one’s senses. There is “more than meets the eye” in the experience of wonder, and I contend here that this is due to the “moreness” of creation itself.

As a “diffused,” created good, creation more fully expresses the divine goodness in the manifoldness and variety of creation, which jointly show forth the goodness. Cosmic diversity is an ordered reality, notionally tying goodness to beauty, which I have dubbed “goodness-in-relation.” As stated above, goodness “properly looks to appetite,”³³⁰ adding a “note” of desire and desirability³³¹ to being, while beauty “looks to the cognitive power.”³³² Aquinas, when discussing beauty, nuances and expands cognition to include not just reasoning but also “pleasure” and “sensation” as “a kind of reason.”³³³

Goodness and beauty are rich metaphysical notions that can ground and account for the experience—in fact, for the very possibility—of wonder. Wonder, because it is affect-driven, points to an openness to the world that brings together in the human a predisposed desire to know. Aquinas speaks of the will as “intellective or rational appetite.”³³⁴ In tying intellection to desire in an way analogous to beauty and goodness, wonder makes sense only when reason is defined amply so as to include “pleasure” and “sensation” as part of the way one moves around, engages, and ultimately discerns the world.

³³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.4.

³³¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.1.

³³² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.4.

³³³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.4.

³³⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.47.

In his treatment on the interrelated themes of creation and goodness, Norman Kretzmann unpacks Aquinas' argument that the notion of goodness (and I would add, beauty) *requires* "intellective [and 'volitional'] beings" as part of creation,³³⁵ that goodness and beauty require rational beings as "a necessary condition of God's manifesting his goodness,"³³⁶ if the final cause for creation is to be "completed" or "optimal."³³⁷ His argument goes as follows:³³⁸ What we know of God, we know from God's activity. God's activity in creation demonstrates both will/desire, and intellect; that is, divine creativity is a *manifestation*. A manifestation is a type of "representation." All representations require three things: what is represented, what is doing the representing, and one to whom the representation is being made. In other words, they can represent "only if somebody... sees and understands them" *as representation, as manifestations*.

Therefore, desiring and intellective creatures are necessary. In other words, if goodness and beauty are to be witnessed, by appetite and reason, respectively, then a genus or genera of witnessing beings with the desire to know are necessary. If goodness elicits desire and beauty lures the intellect, then a being who is "open" to being elicited and lured is needed, if the final cause—unity with the Good—is to be "complete."

This is the key assertion: *Wonder is precisely this openness to the world*. Wonder is not the passion or desire as such. Nor is it the intellective operation, though it "journeys" with the rational quest to know. It is this *disposition toward* desire and intellection. Indeed, wonder

³³⁵ Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa contra gentiles II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 230 ff.

³³⁶ Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 238.

³³⁷ Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 237.

³³⁸ Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 235 ff.

brings together appetite and reason, in that wonder is the disposition of both—what the previous chapter called “openness.”³³⁹

With this look at Aquinas’ doctrine of participation in *Esse* complete, I now turn to a comparative summary of the three thinkers. Then I will propose an ontological structure that grounds the possibility and experience of wonder.

Comparative Observations

As stated earlier, the comparative theological method used here arises from and returns to a confessional commitment to the Christian faith. The overall project is an intentionally Christian theology of wonder. Yet it is a *comparative* project not “ashamed to recognize truth and assimilate it, from whatever quarter it may reach us.”³⁴⁰ I seek to understand better and construe the Christian faith, and in attempting such, I recognize that there is sapiential recourse “from another quarter”³⁴¹ that can shed light on one’s own theological commitments.

Even while upholding the particularity of the Christian faith, I recognize that the three Abrahamic traditions do, in fact, share much. This is not to gloss over or minimize their irreconcilable differences, which at times has been the source of much antipathy, brutality, and death. There *are* substantial disagreements, and these are not ignored as the study proceeds

³³⁹ Cf. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.47. Although Aquinas is not describing wonder in this question, he does seem to speak to wonder, as we define it in this study. He writes, “There is in all things appetite for the good, since, as the philosophers teach, the good is what all desire... In things possessed of understanding it is called intellectual or rational appetite, and this is will. Created intellectual substances, therefore, are endowed with will... in things having cognition the apprehending power is related to the appetitive power as mover to movable, for that which is apprehended by sense or imagination or intellect moves the intellectual or the animal appetite. Intellectual apprehension, however, is not limited to certain things, but reaches out to them all.”

³⁴⁰ Al-Kindī, in Al-Khalili, *The House of Wisdom*, 132.

³⁴¹ Cf. Esther 4:14.

toward its constructive goal. Nevertheless, there *is* “sufficient similarity”³⁴² between the three,³⁴³ and this will not be glossed over or minimized either.³⁴⁴

In fact, for the deepening of the Christian articulation of faith, I contend that it is in the places of tension between similarity and divergences where the best comparative work is done, as this essay demonstrates. In a way analogous to the “place” of wonder, the best comparative work also takes place between resilient relation and resistant rupture, between identity and difference. Comparative work is a wonderful encounter. All three of my chosen thinkers draw from the doctrine of participation (similarity) to construct a vision of existence (similarity) and to articulate their faith in the world *as creation* (similarity); yet each does so with different principles of participation (divergence) and these varying principle do yield distinct visions of reality (divergence).

This concluding, constructive section has three parts. First, I justify the primacy of participation in *being* (Ibn ‘Arabī and Aquinas), but I affirm this metaphysics of participation with some modification and accentuation informed by Ibn Gabirol’s “materialist” contributions. I do so in ways which preserve, I believe, the original ontological picture, but which make better

³⁴² Miroslav Volf, *Allah: A Christian Response*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 89.

³⁴³ Some of the “sufficient similarity” includes revelatory history (e.g. Abraham, Moses), philosophical influences with their respective interpretive traditions (e.g. Neoplatonism, Arabic Aristotelianism), and shared geography where intellectual exchange occurred (e.g. Andalusia/Spain, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Persia).

³⁴⁴ Particularly postmodern scholarship has resisted the talk of “similarity,” “oneness” and the like, considering such moves to be “totalitarian” or “oppressive.” Instead, they prefer the “local” and the “particular” without constructing a vision of the whole—or so they think. Yet, this overemphasis is built on certain fallacies. (Cf. Anselm K. Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World: A Postmodern Theology After Postmodernism* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 47–88. First, larger metaphysical visions have at times been “totalitarian” or “oppressive,” to be sure, but this does not automatically mean that they were or are *necessarily* so. A *totalizing* claim (that is, a claim made on the totality of existence) need not be *totalitarian*. For example, all three thinkers discussed here do not shy away from naming the limits of their inquiry or of the rational faculty as such. Also, within their metaphysics exists a moral philosophy that speaks to things like charity, generosity and the like; and these moral exhortations are made because of, not in spite of, their metaphysical commitments. Second, the postmodernists’ preference for “locality” or “grassroots” also speaks to metaphysical commitments; thus, as they criticize, they replace one vision of the whole for another vision of the whole. In other words, following their example, one can strive to construct a vision of the whole and still maintain a preference for the local, the particular, and the immanent.

sense of and ground the experience of wonder. Second, I offer some comparative analysis as a way to make these modifications and accentuations to Aquinas' doctrine of participation, which ontologically better place wonder within the realm of being. The sublation of features of Ibn Gabirol's "materialism" in a larger participation in being is no "minor tweaking," nor is it a "courtesy nod" to their philosophical and theological efforts. His particularities foster the re-reading of Ibn 'Arabī and Aquinas in ways that accentuate formerly minimized features of their existential ontology. And third, I discuss the most signification similarity between the three, namely, that each one joins together being with generosity, which means that created being is marked by what I call "transcendental Excess." This transcendental excess is what ontologically grounds the excess-within of the world, which in turns is what makes possible the experience of wonder in this world. I begin with the comparative summary and analysis.

An Apologia for Participation in Being

The reason for prioritizing Ibn 'Arabī and Aquinas is not based on the latter of these being a Christian, and the former simply agreeing with him. Since monotheism is central to all three, a Christian can opt, in theory, for Ibn Gabirol for their ontological structure of reality, of course modified to make sense of one's Christological commitments. (Matter is created by God, after all.) The principle reason I prioritize existential participation is simply because there is no escaping being as prior to all else. Being is epistemologically prior in all intellection. Existence actualizes essences; without *esse*, no thing would *be*. Being is the most basic stratum of reality. Even with Ibn Gabirol's materialist ontology, in which things participate in *yesōd*, one must still first posit that *yesōd exists*. Being is inescapable, and as such is prior to all other "higher principles" in which things participates.

What is promising for a Christian metaphysics already, informed by Thomism, is the comparative engagement with Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wujūd*, which like the Aquinian *esse*, is prior to essence. The Divine Breath (existence) is prior to the Divine Names (essences). Giving existential priority affirms both Aquinas’ *esse* and Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wujūd*, and supplies comparative theology with a worthwhile agenda for further reflection. To be sure, Ibn ‘Arabī and Aquinas have some significant difference, most notably their respective treatments on the divine names or attributes.³⁴⁵

This existential priority does not affirm Ibn Gabirol’s “materialism,” though a positive role to matter has factored significantly into the phenomenological reduction of wonder. I recognized that metaphysical and phenomenological accounts of matter are not a one-for-one correlation. Yet, there are key features that they share, like matter as that which “extends” in space and time, and as that which is perceived by the senses. To use phenomenological terms, matter is what constitutes the there-ness of a thing. I make the reflections below carefully and some justification.

The experience of wonder occurs when “deeper stratum of ‘sensation-hyle’” exceeds “natural hyle” of the thing or event eliciting wonder.³⁴⁶ *Hyle* is not simply generic “stuff” or “matter,”³⁴⁷ nor merely “sensation.” It is the “*transcendental residuum* of sensation,”³⁴⁸ a “constitutive layer” of a thing,³⁴⁹ a “primal impression,”³⁵⁰ that precedes the act of intentionality

³⁴⁵ For example, Aquinas would push back on Ibn ‘Arabī’s essentialist account of the divine names. The former, to begin with, objects to the idea all the names should import relations to creatures. (Cf. *Summa Theologica*, I.13.11)

³⁴⁶ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 211; also see: Beyer, “Edmund Husserl,” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/husserl/>.

³⁴⁷ Cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 539 n. 73.

³⁴⁸ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 207.

³⁴⁹ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 209.

³⁵⁰ Rabanaque, “Hyle, Genesis and Noema,” 210.

and yet remains through the act of intentionality.³⁵¹ The *eidictic* reduction of wonder speaks of the exceeding sensation-*hýle* of the object eliciting wonder, in which the sensation-*hýle* exceeds the natural *hýle*, even after the subject's intentionality has reflectively engaged the object that elicited wonder. When speaking about wonder, there is something admirable about Ibn Gabirol's affirmation of the matter, the "stuff," the "thingliness," and the "there-ness" of things, all of which is the "essence" of matter.³⁵² And as this study will eventually conclude, this particularity of "thingliness" and "there-ness" is of the very hue in which the experience of wonder is painted.

Comparative Analysis for Modifying Aquinas' Doctrine of Participation

After delineating and explicating the three thinkers' respective doctrines of participles, what emerges is three parallel couplets that define the core of each thinker's ontology of being. Each couplet is composed of a principle in which creation constitutive participates, and a divine attribute that is appropriated as a correlate to that in which creation participates. See *Figure 2.1*.

<i>Figure 2.1</i>		
Thinker	Principle of Participation	Divine Attribute Related to Participation
Ibn Gabirol	<i>yesōd</i> ('grounding element'; 'foundation'; 'matter'*)	desire
Ibn' Arabī	<i>wujūd</i> ("being"; "knowing"; "being known")	mercy
Aquinas	<i>esse</i> ("being"; "act of being"; "existence")	goodness (& beauty as goodness-in-relation)
* Pessin contests this translation of <i>yesōd</i> .		

³⁵¹ Rabanaque, "Hyle, Genesis and Noema," 208, 211, 213.

³⁵² Cf. Charles Huenemann, "Spinoza and Prime Matter," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, no. 1 (2004): 21–32; Thomas M. Lennon, "The Eleatic Descartes," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45, no. 1 (2007): 29–45; Desmond M. Clarke, "Descartes' Proof of the Existence of Matter," ed. Stephen Gaukroger, *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations*, Blackwell Guides to Great Works, 2 (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2006), 160–78.

We begin with a comparative analysis of the ontological proposals at hand. In this comparative piece, exploration of difference may ultimately yield greater similarity. And, inquiry into similarity may lead to more pronounced difference. These similarities and differences cannot be reduced to semantics.

The difference is rooted in different visions of God as creator and sustainer of reality; that is, difference in how divine *providence* is understood. By this I mean that the divergences between the doctrines of participations and the principles in which things participate are due to each one's view of divine providence, or to how each sees creaturely agency in light of divine providence. Ibn 'Arabī's occasionalism gives total causal efficacy to God, to the point of saying that secondary or natural causes are not real causes at all. They are but "veils."³⁵³ This occasionalism is metaphysically supported by his notion of "double participation," through which things participate in the divine breath for their existence and in the divine names for their essence. There is nothing that is properly the creature's in their *being*. All that a thing is, is given to it via participation.

Conversely, Ibn Gabirol's "highest principle" as *yesōd* suggests that he endorses a strong and, dare I say, "providential" efficacy *within* the created order. For example, whereas Aquinas and Ibn 'Arabī speak of God desiring to bring form and matter together, thus causing things to be, Ibn Gabirol situates the desire to be *in matter*. It is matter that desires form so that it may *be*, not God desiring for things to be and therefore joining form to matter. Now, *yesōd* is related to God. As his poetry shows, Ibn Gabirol portrays this "grounding element" as "the heavenly throne"³⁵⁴ upon which God "sits." For the Jewish poet, divine desire is mediated through material desire.

³⁵³ Cf. Özgür Koca, "Causality as a 'Veil': The Ash'arites, Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240) and Said Nursī (1877–1960)," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*, 27.4 (2016): 455–470. Cf. Karen Harding, "Causality Then and Now: Al Ghazali and Quantum Theory," *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 10.2 (1993): 165–77.

³⁵⁴ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.42; in Pessin, "Matter, Form, and the Corporeal World," 289.

Aquinian metaphysics preserves both the “primary” cause of God and the “secondary” natural causes. This perseverance of “this compatibility without rivalry” of divine and natural agency³⁵⁵ is structured by his articulation of the doctrine of participation. God is the *totally* efficient cause of things, in that things participate in Her for their *existence*. Yet, regarding their *essential* constitution, Aquinas is adamant in stating that God is not the *formal* cause of things. God is the exemplar cause, in that the *Logos* or Mind of God holds all forms.³⁵⁶ Essences play a role in the participatory structure in that they delimit the *esse* in which they participate. Limitation in this essential sense is not a bad thing, for it is the *essential* contours that define beings for what they are, each manifesting in its own way divine goodness and beauty. The nature of essences and their ability to act causally is affirmed, while God remains as the first efficient cause of all causality. The differences in doctrines of participation correlate to a difference in doctrines of divine providence.

Upon reflection on all three of these ontological models, I suggest that the greatest similarity between the three models of participation involve desire and intellect. For Aquinas, goodness is what is desired, and the goodness and being are convertible terms. Therefore, being is inherently about desire. For Ibn Gabirol, *yesōd* as the “ground element” of reality desires form *so that it may be*. Therefore, desire is embedded in the very “embroidery”³⁵⁷ of existence. And for Ibn ‘Arabī, God’s command, “Be,” comes from God’s *desire*.³⁵⁸

The similarity continues with regard to the *object* of desire and the *path* to “fulfill” said desire. For all three, the object of desire is the good, and the *path* to that good is through

³⁵⁵ Thomas Joseph White, “Catholic Predestination: The Omnipotence and Innocence of Divine Love,” in *Thomism and Predestination: Principles and Disputations*, ed. Steven A. Long, Roger W Nutt, and Thomas Joseph White (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, 2016), 94–126.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.44.3.

³⁵⁷ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 7.

³⁵⁸ In Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 293.

knowledge of all things and toward the source of all things, namely, “the One” (Ibn Gabirol), *Wujūd* (Ibn ‘Arabī), and *Esse Subsistens* (Aquinas). For Ibn Gabirol, argues Pessin, “[I]t is precisely matter’s desire for form,” which involves the activity of Divine *Irāda*, “that marks the Theology of Desire’s grounding of all being and human beings in the God-born and God-directed desire for something of the goodness of God.”³⁵⁹ Echoing Pessin, John Laumakis states that since all things, including matter, “desire unity,” and since “the One” is goodness, all things come to be because of goodness and move toward goodness.³⁶⁰ Similarly, Ibn ‘Arabī speaks of connects moral desire for God to the creative desire of God, posits that the human “rests” when the former aligns with the latter. “‘Make me desire every that Thou desirest,’ so that there may be nothing but what God desires.”³⁶¹ Aquinas speaks of goodness both as efficient cause in that goodness is “self-diffusing,” and as the final cause in that goodness is the end of all things.

The notion of goodness has two further implications for being, which are shared by Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas. First is that goodness brings together being and knowing, ontology and epistemology. Since being manifests goodness, humans are the pinnacle of beings because they can know and witness to goodness. Aquinas’ argument that the notion of goodness requires rational beings as “a necessary condition of God’s manifesting his goodness,”³⁶² if the final cause for creation is to be “completed” or “optimal.”³⁶³ Knowing goodness (epistemology) is the end of being (ontology). Ibn Gabirol situates creaturely desire to know the Source of life (epistemology) within matter’s desires for form (ontology).³⁶⁴ According to Ibn ‘Arabī, the human

³⁵⁹ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 17.

³⁶⁰ John A. Laumakis, “Introduction,” in Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 40; cf. Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, V.32.

³⁶¹ In Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 307.

³⁶² Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 238.

³⁶³ Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation*, 237.

³⁶⁴ Ibn Gabirol, *The Font of Life*, 5.32.

is “made in the form of all the names of God” (ontology), but “he does not actualize these names until they become an established and deeply rooted part of his character” (epistemology).³⁶⁵

A second implication involves the *path* of knowing, which witnesses to the goodness of being, and to the Source of being, which is Goodness itself. Interestingly, Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas all affirm that to experience the Good, one cannot bypass the creaturely manifestation of good *en route* to encountering a glimpse of Goodness itself. Rather, it is through knowing or yearning to know the totality of created being, both in its universality and its particularity, that one moves to Goodness itself as the source of being. And that particularity is manifested materially. Or to speak phenomenologically, particularity is essentially “hylic” (as in *hýle*). One cannot circumvent the minutiae of creation to get at the universal scope of created being and to the Source of being. Rather, one encounters, and is transformed by, the goodness of the whole *through* the goodness of the particular. This idea is best captured by an exchange between Student and Teacher towards the end of *Fons Vitae*.

Student: ...in all things that were created there is only matter and form...

Teacher: You should not believe that the knowledge of matter and form can be enough for you to know all things. But wait. Do not be hasty... Distinguish matter from form, and form from the will, and the will from the motion by the most certain distinction in your understanding. For when you do this, your soul will be thinned out, your intellect will become clear, and it will penetrate all the way into the world of the intelligence...”³⁶⁶

“But wait. Do not be hasty.” Pessin concludes, “As locus of desire, matter is *that which first moves us* on our tripartite human quest for wisdom, goodness, and God.”³⁶⁷

By asserting that each and every being is a “theophany” of “divine names and acts,”³⁶⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī is lifting up and celebrating the particularity of each being as a manifestation of the

³⁶⁵ In Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 283.

³⁶⁶ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.43.

³⁶⁷ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 41. (Italics added for emphasis.)

³⁶⁸ Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235.

Good. He adds that the good life is the one lived yearning to know all the divine names. Like the “distinguishing” of particularities of being in Ibn Gabirol and “divine names and acts” in Ibn ‘Arabī, Aquinas affirms the “manifoldness” and “diversity” of existence as *together* expressing more fully the goodness of God.³⁶⁹ Consequently, growing in intimacy of the Good requires a delving into, not a circumventing of, the rich diversity through which goodness is made manifest.

When read closely, all three thinkers *structure* this dialectic of particularity and universality into their wider metaphysical frameworks. That is to say, each offers a metaphysics in which the doctrine of participation is crucial, and which accounts for the universe as a *whole* and as a *sum*. Ibn Gabirol does so by speaking of a gradation of different types of matter, with a corresponding gradation of form. So, “the presence of matter [is] in all things”; yet, this material gradation “comes along with the idea of a grade of pure, unformed matter that lies at the core of reality.”³⁷⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī structures both particularity and universality by distinguishing the particularity of divine names manifested diversely in creation from the universality of the divine breath in which all being participates.³⁷¹ In addition to his elevation of diversity as the fuller expression of goodness,³⁷² Aquinas’ structure accounts for both particularity and universality by speaking of divine providence directly over and above both the universality and particularity of being. Aquinas declares, “Everything falls under divine providence, not merely in its universality but in its particularity.”³⁷³ This is an ontology of creaturely being that makes sense and also upholds the totality of all being and the universality of being. As I propose below, this

³⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.97–98.

³⁷⁰ Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol’s Theology of Desire*, 13–14.

³⁷¹ William C. Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī on the Ultimate Model of the Ultimate,” 921–22; Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy,” 235.

³⁷² Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III.97–98.

³⁷³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.22.2.

affirmation of both universality and particularity is essential to understanding the ontological tension at the base of wonder.

The greatest similarity between Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas is to be found in the divine attributes that each appropriates in their respective doctrines of participation. Although each uses a different term (desire, mercy, and goodness), there is another, deeper notion that lies behind all three terms. And it is this: the notion of divine *generosity*. All three, in speaking of desire, mercy, or goodness, intend to point to *generosity* as the source of existence. In *Fons Vitae*, Ibn Gabirol states that his notion of divine desire is discussed in detail in a work no longer extant, titled *The Origin of Generosity and the Cause of Being*,³⁷⁴ intimating a connection between desire and generosity. Ibn ‘Arabī dedicates an entire chapter in *The Meccan Revelations* to the “knowledge of the waystation of the keys to the treasures of generosity,”³⁷⁵ where he explicitly ties mercy to generosity. In one of his poems, he professes that “[God’s] self-generosity is that which rules.”³⁷⁶ For Aquinas, although all of God’s attributes are identical, the act of creation is tied to Divine goodness and specifically, goodness *as generosity* (lit. “liberality”), for it is the very essence of goodness to give, to be “liberal.”³⁷⁷ This “liberality,” this “excess,” saturates created reality. *Divine generosity is the transcendental Excess that ontologically grounds the excess-within of creation, which in turns makes possible the experience of wonder.*

³⁷⁴ Ibn Gabirol, *Fons Vitae*, 5.40

³⁷⁵ Mohamed Haj Yousef, “Ibn al-‘Arabī: the Treasury of Absolute Mercy,” *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society* 48, (2010), <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/treasury-of-absolute-mercy.html>, accessed on June 6, 2018.

³⁷⁶ In Yousef, “Ibn al-‘Arabī: the Treasury of Absolute Mercy,”), <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/treasury-of-absolute-mercy.html>.

³⁷⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, III.16, VII.10; idem., *Summa Theologica*, I.44.4.

The Metaphysics of Wonder

The chapter began with an open question regarding wonder from Chapter 1 that is out of the reach of the *epoché*, in that they imply metaphysical realities that go beyond the phenomenological method. Transcending the phenomenological gaze, this question is metaphysical in nature, that is to say, it implies a “structure” that stands behind the experience of wonder. The question is: what metaphysical structure can make sense of the *ontological tension* between identity and difference in the relational-qualitative event of wonder? The ontological tension suggests an embedded relation, or embedded relations, within the fabric of reality that make wonder a possible type of experience. It requires that one open the back window to the world of wonder, searching not for the *experience* of wonder, but a *metaphysical and ontological grounding* that makes such an experience possible.

Existence is grounded in generosity. I am calling this metaphysical aspect, *transcendental Excess*. Meaning, divine generosity as infinite excess cuts across all created reality. Generosity has two features which speak to wonder: gift and excess. With human generosity, Aquinas posits that the agent is also patient, that is, that she gets something that she needs in return. Yet, with God there is “pure liberality since God neither needs nor lacks.”³⁷⁸ Thus, existence is pure gift.

When experienced, wonder is linked to one’s desire to know: to one’s inherent goodness and to the object’s or objects’ inherent goodness. Goodness is tied to being and truth. Yet there seems to be no inherent *need* for wonder, at least with regards to basic functioning or survival. It is gratuitous; it makes life more enjoyable. Wonder is a gift. Wonder, too, is generous excess

³⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.44.4.

and not simply the experience of excess. As the artist M. C. Escher declares, “Those who wonder discover that this in itself is wonder.”³⁷⁹

Ibn ‘Arabī and Aquinas both speak of the *Esse* or *Wujūd* as inexhaustible and unbreakable. By this they mean that God does not deplete or break Herself up in giving Her being to creation. God is eternal in that She, in the words of Boethius, “is the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life.”³⁸⁰ Creation “partakes” in Being/Finding Itself; it does not “take a part” or “take apart.”³⁸¹ Although creation is bound and limited, it has its life by participating in the boundlessness of Life itself. Created life therefore is saturated by the Divine life.

The doctrine of participation tells of a “boundless” Source of a bounded creation. Even limited life is grounded in limitlessness. The proportionate is grounded in excess. *It is from this excess that wonder emerges as a possibility in this life.* The alluring “redness” of a tomato in the grocery store or the lush greenery of a forest serves other purposes in the functioning and survival of life. This survival has no need for wonder; yet wonder happens anyway. And sometimes, it remains in the form of awe. *The occurrence of wonder is the continual gifting of the excessive gift of Life itself.*

Wonder is the experience of “being gripped from without.” It captures one’s gaze and attention. Or in mental experiences of wonder, it captures one’s imagination and memory. One is drawn to that event or memory, and the things in the event or memory have a gravitational pull upon us. Goodness is about desire: desire to be, to know, and to be known. *Wonder is ultimately*

³⁷⁹ In Fuller, *Wonder*, 80.

³⁸⁰ Boethius, “The Consolidation of Philosophy,” in *The Theological Tractates & The Consolation of Philosophy*, New ed., trans. H. F. Stewart, Edward Kennard Rand, and S. J. Tester, The Loeb Classical Library, 74 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), V.6.

³⁸¹ Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas*, 132.

grounded in the same goodness that grounds existence because wonder, like goodness, expresses desire—indeed the deepest desire, the know the Good.

The excess of creation saturates each entity in itself and all entities together in their manifold relations. The excessive gift of life is to be found in the universe as a whole *and* in the universe as sum. The sum speaks to the totality of beings, and the whole, to the universality of being. The latter includes the “relations” between entities or beings. These relations too are marked by excess. Yet, the relations are neither inconsequential nor subsuming. To be a being is to be a being in relation. Yet, the particularity and integrity of each being is upheld always. The doctrine of participation best articulates this dynamic, for it ensures that both the whole and the sum of existence fall under the providence of Subsisting Being.³⁸² *The doctrine of participation in generosity makes sense of the ontological tension between identity and difference at the base of wonder because participation in generosity grounds all relations excessively.*

A Gabirolian note of particularity is necessary. Within created existence, particularity “happens” in matter. It happens *materially*. Each entity is a limitation (Ibn ‘Arabī) or privation (Aquinas) of Being by way of matter. Each entity is *not* any other entity because of its materiality. At the same time, all created beings (except angels) share materiality as such. Because the ontological tension between identity and difference in wonder is metaphysically situated between particularity of beings and universality of being, matter is a key piece in the experience of wonder.

To be sure, the doctrine of participation in Being (Ibn ‘Arabī and Aquinas) can account for the ontological tension in that beings are distinct in the way they participate in being because

³⁸² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.22.2.

of their essential distinction. Yet they all partake in the same one Being. Yet, what the accent on matter gives this ontological picture is the highlighting of the place of wonder. Beings relate to each other by extension and locality.³⁸³ The moments of wonder are marked and remembered in their locality and extension. We say, “It is the east face of the mountain range that captured me.” Or, “I was sitting there when I saw...” When the intense moment of wonder involves a solitary object, there is in that an attention to detail: color, movement, place, and so forth. The object’s or field’s gripping of the subject is never vague. When the intense moment of wonder involves a broader, perspectival field, the attention to detail is not lost. Instead, included in the details are the relations that construct the whole panorama of the wondrous encounter. And these relations show forth with lucidity and transcendence. It seems that it is matter that grips us in the event of wonder, matter both familiar and mysterious.

In closing, divine generosity is the transcendental Excess that ontologically grounds the excess-within of creation, which in turns makes possible the experience of wonder. That is to say, existence is grounded in generosity. As transcendental notion of being, generosity-as-excess cuts across all created reality. Wonder is not only the experience of excess; it too is excess. It is a gift. The occurrence of wonder is the continual gifting of the excessive gift of Life itself. Wonder is ultimately grounded in the same goodness that grounds existence because wonder, like goodness, expresses desire—indeed the deepest desire, the know the Good.

The excessive gift of life is to be found in the universe as a whole and in the universe as sum. The excess-within of creation saturates each entity in itself and all entities together in their relations. Meaning, these relations also saturated by excessive generosity. To be a being is to be a being in relation. To be in relation requires upholding and maintaining the particularity and

³⁸³ Cf. Thomas M. Lennon, “The Eleatic Descartes,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 45, no. 1 (2007): 29-45.

integrity of each being. Thus, the doctrine of participation in generosity best articulates this dynamic, for it ensures that both the whole and the sum of existence fall under the providence of Subsisting Being.³⁸⁴ The doctrine of participation in generosity makes sense of the ontological tension between identity and difference at the base of wonder because participation in generosity grounds all relations excessively.

This concludes our study on the metaphysics of wonder. The study now moves to constructive theology. First, since generosity is a significant finding in this metaphysical investigation, I offer a theological account of generosity in the following excursus. Then, in Chapters 3 and 4, I use the experience of wonder, and its grounding metaphysics of generosity, to offer an initial theo-thaumatic sketch of the human being (Chapter 3) and to reframe Christian praxis, liturgy and liberation in theo-thaumatic terms.

³⁸⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1.22.2.

**Excursus on Generosity:
A Trinitarian Reflection on the Holy Spirit as “Giver of Life”**

*The world, things, and human beings have come to be penetrated by
the generous sap of God.*

—Leonardo Boff¹

*The distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit lies precisely... in being wholly
relational and as such [is] the divine source of all relations,
communions, and solidarities.*

—Anselm Min²

So what is generosity, theologically speaking? This excursus constructs a working theological definition of generosity, first as it pertains to God, and then as it pertains to creation as God’s creative activity. It is intentionally a basic exploration so as to give generosity a prominent place but without losing sight of the principal question of the project, namely, wonder. Since generosity is elemental and “co-extensive” with being³ and the grounding metaphysical “quality” of wonder, a basic theological articulation of generosity is in order.

Generosity is *essentially* excessive. That is to say, it “exceeds” itself and extends out to the other. Generosity is goodness, for the latter is marked by a “self-diffusing” impetus. The term “generosity” denotes the “givingness” of goodness. Aquinas agrees with this relationship between generosity and goodness: the one who gives without need exemplifies “liberality” and the effect or result of that generosity is deemed good *precisely because of that “liberality.”* “We

¹ Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life: Life of the Sacraments*, Story Theology (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987), 4.

² Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 110.

³ In his doctrine of transcendentals, Aquinas asserts that there are qualities that are “co-extensive” with being: thing, unity, truth, goodness, and beauty. I am not arguing for an additional transcendental that is co-extensive with being. Rather, by generosity, I am framing and giving definitive depth to goodness. Since it is the very essence of the good to give, to be “liberal,” I am using “generosity” as the essential meaning of goodness. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, 1994. *Truth, Volume 1*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), I.1; idem., *On the Power of God*, III.16, VII.10; idem., *Summa Theologica*, I.44.4.

exist because [God] is good,” declared Augustine.⁴ It is the essence of the good to give *excessively*. Goodness is “diffusive of its existence.”⁵ Yet, since God is infinite Goodness, the font of generosity is inexhaustible. Ibn Sīnā, a major interlocutor for Aquinas, also argues for the equivalence of goodness and “liberality.” He explains, “Every bestowal of perfection would be a good in relation to the recipient, regardless of whether or not it is accomplished by recompense; but [it] would not be liberality in relation to the agent unless there is no recompense.”⁶ It is the very essence of Goodness Itself to give, to be “liberal.”⁷

Now, this might lead some to conclude that the act of creation is a *necessary* act of God, and therefore not done in complete freedom—in short, that God is bound to give. The objection might be stated in this way: If God is in essence Goodness Itself, and since goodness is driven to give, then God *had* to create in order to be good. Yet this objection does not hold for a trinitarian understanding of God, which is marked by the generous giving and receiving of the Three Persons. In other words, the self-diffusing quality of Goodness *is the very essence of* the “subsisting relations”⁸ of the Triune God. Thus, any self-diffusing goodness that is poured out beyond the immanent Trinity is an act of generosity that is most pure, free, and true.

The generosity of gifting existence, i.e. creation, is giving freely without needing to *and* giving more than is needed. Creation is not simply a gift, but a truly *excessive* gift. This excess is the very fiber of created existence: creation is the quintessence of true generosity. As Leonardo

⁴ Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R.P.H. Green, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), I.33; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.19.4.

⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.5.4.

⁶ Ibn Sīnā writes, “Liberality, then, is the bestowal of perfection on one who, in all respects, is in no need of a benefit. Thus, this meaning would be a good in relation to the recipient and, in relation to the agent, liberality. Every bestowal of perfection would be a good in relation to the recipient, regardless of whether or not it is accomplished by recompense; but [it] would not be liberality in relation to the agent unless there is no recompense. This, then, is the explanation of the reality of the [beneficial] good and of liberality.” (*The Metaphysics of the Healing*, VI.5.48.

⁷ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, III.16, VII.10; idem., *Summa Theologica*, I.44.4.

⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.30.2.

Boff declares, “The world, things, and human beings have come to be penetrated by the generous sap of God.”⁹ The pulp of being is this generous excess.

Moreover, generosity is dynamic. It is not a deistic, once-upon-a-time gift, but an ongoing gift,¹⁰ a dynamic of perennial giving-and-receiving. The Trinitarian relations can be an analogous image of that giving-and-receiving movement embedded in creation. I make such an analogy carefully—in right “proportion” (Greek and Latin: *analogia*)—so as to maintain the difference between Creator and creation as greater than their similarity.

There are three general distinctions that must be made before analogously utilizing the givingness of the Trinity for understanding created existence. Here, I name and describe each distinction briefly. First, God’s being is distinct from created reality in that there is no distinction between essence and existence in God. God is being by Essence, whereas all created reality is being by participation,¹¹ as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

Second, following Kathryn Tanner, one cannot see Divine “Person” as a univocal image of human “persons.” Tanner highlights that among the divine Persons, unlike human *hypostases*, “the giver’s remaining giftful does not come at the expense of the gifts to another,” and “giving to others does not come at one’s own expense.”¹² Moreover, trinitarian Persons are fully who they are *in their immanent relations*, since they relate to one another immediately and not in a mediated way as humans do.¹³ Yet, although their relations are immediate, this relational

⁹ Boff, *Sacraments of Life: Life of the Sacraments*, 4.

¹⁰ As Aquinas clarifies, creation is not a singular act at the beginning of created existence. Instead, it is “the emanation of *all being* from the universal cause, which is God.” In Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.45.1; cf. I.45.4.

¹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.4.

¹² Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 90.

¹³ Kathryn Tanner, “Absolute Difference,” in *Divine Multiplicity: Trinities, Diversities, and the Nature of Relation*, Chris Boesel and S. Wesley Ariarajah, Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 229.

intensity does not threaten the individuality of each Person. Such intensity of relationship would blur humans' particular identities, and in fact would do so in demeaning ways.¹⁴ Therefore, any attempt to apply trinitarian relations directly to human relations, as social trinitarians are prone to do,¹⁵ is theologically problematic.

And third, God as Generosity (or God's generosity) is wholly different from creaturely acts of generosity. The gift of *being* is infinitely greater than any gift that creatures can give back to God. Indeed, as Stephen Webb notes, "To say that giving is born of excess is to acknowledge God as the one who creates our giving."¹⁶ Divine giving grounds our giving and receiving at the created level of existence. The act of creation, as the "giving" of the whole of being from nothing, belongs to God alone. Thus, there is no "recompense" from creatures that can equitably account for—or "pay back"—the gift of being.

These distinctions are necessary in order to posit that the giving-and-receiving of the Trinity grounds created existence. The entry point for such a claim is *pneumatology*. Daniel Migliore rightly asserts, "A Christian theology of the Holy Spirit will speak of the correspondence between the work of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation and the activity

¹⁴ Tanner, "Absolute Difference," 230.

¹⁵ Many social trinitarian proposals, which see the sharing of the divine Persons as a model for a just society, fail to take these vital analogical steps with regards to personhood. For a prominent social trinitarian who uses this model, see: Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Theology and Liberation Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); for critics of this approach, see Sarah Coakley, "'Persons' in the 'Social' Doctrine of the Trinity: A Critique of Current Analytic Discussion," *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, eds. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall & Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 123–44. Tanner, like Coakley, unpacks the problem well: "Here in the Trinity is relationality taken to an unimaginable extreme, and in the light of it one can reflect, as in a photographic negative, on what so often goes wrong in human lives, sometimes no doubt because of sinful failings, but more often than not as an inevitable concomitant of simple finitude: how one love pushes out another despite an earnest, and often quite innocent, desire to share ourselves more widely; how we are both built up and eventually undone by those who have made us what we are; how the need to carry on without them, and the slow dampening of once visceral ties, lead us to replace those who have meant everything to us; and so on." ("Absolute Difference," 218)

¹⁶ Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 140.

of the Spirit in the eternal life of the triune God.”¹⁷ The Holy Spirit is generosity and mutuality, both in the immanent Life of the Triune God and in Her economic Life in the world. Holy Writ portrays the Holy Spirit as “God *in us*,”¹⁸ as the God “experienced” in faith and life. The Spirit hovers over creation and is placed into *adam*. The prophets proclaim God’s word by the anointing of the Spirit. The Incarnation and Resurrection are enacted by the power of the Spirit. The Church becomes the continuing presence of Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit “groans” with creation yearning for the final redemption of all that is, including itself.¹⁹ The Holy Spirit is immanently at work *within* created being. This is the *economic* Trinitarian understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Regarding the *immanent* Trinity, the Church Mothers and Fathers witness to the Holy Spirit as the “mutual love” between the Father and the Son, as the “Giving” between the Father and the Son.²⁰ The trinitarian God is not some generic “substance” that then is populated by or divided up into three Persons.²¹ Rather, the Father eternally giving in the Son all that He is, the Son eternally receiving and giving back to the Father, and finally, the Holy Spirit being the eternal giving and receiving between the Father and the Son, together *is God*. God as Being Itself is *Generosity* Itself, and this is made known in creation and revelation *by the Holy Spirit*.

Since there is a “correspondence” between the immanent and economic Spirit, then to profess faith in the Holy Spirit as “the Lord and Giver of life” is duly to affirm creation as

¹⁷ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 330.

¹⁸ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 223.

¹⁹ Genesis 1:2; Genesis 2:7; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 1:35; Ephesians 1:20; Romans 8:22–23.

²⁰ Augustine, *The Trinity (De trinitate)*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), V.11. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.37.1–2.

²¹ As I read him, Richard Swinburne inadvertently makes this fallacy. Cf. *idem.*, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 150–91.

marked by or imbued with this mutuality and sharing-ness of the Spirit. Anselm Min concurs: “The distinctiveness of the Holy Spirit lies precisely... in being wholly relational and as such [is] the divine source of all relations, communions, and solidarities.”²² The “Giver of life” is also “Gift,” which “imports an *aptitude* for being given.”²³ Givingness is part of the gift of life. To participate in being is to participate in generosity as *givingness*.

There is one more aspect to pneumatology that I raise here. The Holy Spirit as mutually shared love must juxtapose this mutuality of sharing with a maintenance of difference, for both of these qualities mark the immanent and economic activities appropriated to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, precisely as the mutual love between the Father and the Son, maintains the difference between them. In a like manner, as a creative agent the Holy Spirit maintains the multiplicity and uniqueness of all created things, and as giver of spiritual gifts encourages the difference and individuality of persons.²⁴ This is the pneumatological grounding for both otherness and solidarity. The Spirit is the dialectical *locus* of mutual sharing and the maintained difference. She is the “place”²⁵ of ontological tension between identity and difference.

To live means to participate in this dynamic of givingness; to live *fully* is to respond to this givingness by living generously in the world. Or to phrase it differently, to live fully into this givingness is to open oneself up to be a created (i.e. limited) agent of dynamic giving-and-

²² Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 110.

²³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.38.1. (Italics added for emphasis.)

²⁴ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity*, 83.

²⁵ Basil the Great names the Holy Spirit as “place.” In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, he lays out his understanding the Spirit as place. The Spirit, as “the whole that exists in the parts.” Working from the biblical phrase, “*in* the Spirit,” Basil considers the preposition “in” to be significant and points out that it not only refers to the Spirit “in us,” but also of dwelling *in* the Spirit as “our place.” He summarizes, “So, the Spirit is truly the place of the saints, and the saint is the proper place for the Holy Spirit.” In Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. Stephen Hildebrand, Popular Patristic Series (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011).

receiving. In this sense, there is a “duality of gift,” namely, “its gratuity and its demand.”²⁶

One’s gratitude to gift’s gratuity is “to acknowledge God as the one who creates our giving.”²⁷

Openness to gift’s demand is, paradoxically, also a gift, since “a gift accrues more giving.”²⁸

Moreover, to open oneself up to the dynamic giving-and-receiving necessitates the gratuitous and demanding gift of *community*. Webb writes, “[T]he excess of God’s grace does not dissipate in the act of its giving; such excess inevitably takes shape in the lives of the people who choose to respond to it, and this response is community.”²⁹ Without community, “the gift perishes.” When givingness is operative in community, “God honors our gifts with the grace of discovery and solidarity.”³⁰ Communal giving is “grace”—the Greek *charis* connotes both “grace” and “gift.”³¹ The Holy Spirit makes us *charismatic*.

Creation is sustained by the Spirit; new creation, enacted by the Spirit. To say that creation exists by way of gift does not suffice. Rather, creation exists by way of *giving*. Creation is God’s gift, perennially given—creation as God’s givingness to the other.³² The nature of being is therefore givingness and not simply gift.

Furthermore, creation is “telic” (as in *telos*); it comes with the “aptitude” to respond. Thus, the gift of being is also a task: the task of sharing, of accepting one’s receiving-and-giving as essential to and constitutive of one’s being. Humans, as most fully present to being,³³ are the

²⁶ Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 148.

²⁷ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 140.

²⁸ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 6.

²⁹ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 148.

³⁰ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 148.

³¹ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 148.

³² Ibn ‘Arabī’s occasionalism seeks to grasp this ongoing dynamic of creation, as does Aquinas’ definition of creation as the ontologically prior emanation of all of being from God.

³³ Cf. Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word: Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 28.

bearers for this task. This task of reconciliation is given to humanity, and the message of this task is given to the Church for all humanity.³⁴

How does wonder fit into this givingness of creation? First, wonder is the experience of *pure being* since the dynamic giving-and-receiving and the experience of excess are the marks of wonder. Wonder reveals the “aptitude” of givenness that marks created existence. Second, the dynamics of receiving and giving are an integral part of all being, not simply human subjectivity. Thus, wonder as desire is “placed” within the world as a whole and in the world amongst beings in relation. This may be why Scripture speaks of creation “groaning” in hope, of rocks “crying out” the praises of God, of the heavens “telling the glory of God,” and of “the firmament proclaim[ing] his handiwork.”³⁵ So the excess-within of creation is an objective reality and not simply a subjective experience. Third, although the dynamic of receiving and giving is an integral part of all being [i.e. objective being], it is supremely present to humans as subjectively-active and self-aware beings. As the most self-aware beings among all created being, humanity can become aware of being as such and of its giving-and-receiving dynamic. Humanity can come to “hear” the groaning creation and the crying rocks. It can witness God’s glory and handiwork.

From the perspective of human experience, wonder is the availability to and encounter with the generosity-as-desire placed within creation. The being-grasped of wonder, which comes from without but is experienced within, is an experience of the giving-and-receiving dynamic embedded in creation. In this sense, wonder is an “excessive” gift from the Giver of life who is this giving-and-receiving dynamic and who imbues all creation with the “aptitude” for such an excessive experience.

³⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.

³⁵ Romans 8:22–23; Luke 19:40; Psalm 19:1.

CHAPTER 3—OPENED *TO* THE WORLD OR *BY* THE WORLD? TOWARD A THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF WONDER

Is this not the very meaning of the face, of the primordial speaking that summons me, questions me, stirs me, provokes my response or my responsibility...?

—Emmanuel Lévinas¹

At the root of our yearning for integrity is a stir of the inexpressible with us to commune with the ineffable beyond us.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel²

Chapter one used the phenomenological notion of *epoché* to provide a philosophical account of wonder. In that chapter, I concluded that wonder signifies or points to an “excess within” things themselves and indeed within the horizon of experience itself. Against Marion, I suggested that it is not that moments of wonder exceed the horizon of experience, as he claims with his notion of “saturated phenomena,” but that the horizon itself is marked by an excess. Yet, I argued further, this excessive horizon is never normalized since emotive responses like curiosity, awe, dread, and shock typically accompany the experience of wonder. Wonder demonstrates that excess never becomes “the new normal.”

The phenomenological method is indeed incisive, but it can only take the investigation of wonder so far. Thus, in chapter two, I approach wonder metaphysically to get a substantial look at what may “stand behind” wonder. This move is methodologically significant. The inquiring glance shifts from the “being-given” of phenomenology to the “given being” of metaphysics (again to use Masterson’s phrase).³ The phenomenological reduction of chapter one suggested an

¹ Emmanuel Lévinas, “Beyond Intentionality,” in *Philosophy in France Today*, ed. Alan Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 111. One can read Lévinas as undoing Sartre’s ontology by reversing it. Against Sartre, the human is first being-for-others, which constitutes their being-for-itself. Finally, in reflection, the human recognizes being-in-itself. (Cf. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 24–32, 119 ff., 301 ff.)

² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976), 175.

³ Masterson, *Approaching God*, 126–27.

“ontological tension” between identity and otherness, between the subject being “grasped” by wonder and the object, event, or field doing the “grasping.”

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the doctrine of participation makes sense of and grounds the “ontological tension” of identity and difference present in the event of wonder. The respective doctrines of participation of Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas were studied closely. In the end, I chose participation in *being* (Aquinas’ *esse* and Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wujūd*) for its comprehensiveness. What is more comprehensive than being? In these doctrines of participation, the clear distinction between essence and existence explains what “stands under” (*sub-stantia*) the ontological tension between identity and difference that is present in the event of wonder. Ibn Gabirol’s “materialist” participation does provide necessary modifications. Ibn Gabirol’s material agency couples well with the features of “sensation-*hyle*” and spatiality that play prominent roles in the event of wonder. I read Aquinas *with* Ibn ‘Arabī because the latter’s deployment of *wujūd* more substantially names the unity of being and knowing/perceiving than does Aquinas’ *esse*. *Wujūd* is both an ontological and an epistemological category. (In a sense then, wonder is thoroughly “wujudian.”) To be clear, the unity of being and knowing *is* present in Aquinas, but it must be deduced, either metaphysically by way of “the transcendentals,” or dogmatically by way of the *Logos*.

Despite their major differences, a crucial similarity between Ibn Gabirol’s, Ibn ‘Arabī’s, and Aquinas’ doctrines of participation remains: All three affirm that *generosity* ultimately grounds existence. Generosity is a constitutive or derivative element of *yesōd* (Ibn Gabirol), *wujūd* (Ibn ‘Arabī), and *esse* (Aquinas). Generosity is *essentially* excessive. Generosity is giving freely without needing to *and* giving more than needed. Moreover, generosity is dynamic; that is, an ongoing giving-and-receiving movement is essential to generosity. Yet, the gift of being is

infinitely greater than any gift that creatures can give back to God in response. As I asserted at the end of chapter one, the event of wonder is the experience of the excess-within of the world, which I then argue in chapter two is grounded in a transcendental excess. This doctrine of excessive generosity (or generous excess) functions as a fundamental theology that establishes the terrain for the present chapter, which is thoroughly theological.

The current chapter is an exploration in theological anthropology. Here, I paint a theological portrait of the human based on wonder (excess-within) and the metaphysics of generosity (transcendental Excess). I assert that the capacity for wonder is a responsive reaching out that is at the core of human being (in response to being grasped by the O/other), and that reaching out is infinite. Such an understanding of wonder makes wonder indispensable to a theological account of the human in general, and of the human act of faith in God specifically. Thus, wonder is not a luxury or amenity of life. Rather, wonder is indispensable and necessary.

To establish this claim, I will take the following steps. First, I propose the indispensable role of theological anthropology. Theological anthropology establishes the ground for proper theological discourse; that is to say, it is an indispensable part, alongside divine transcendence, of the “anatomy” of *theologia fundamentalis*. Second, I review key anthropological features both of the phenomenological description of wonder (chapter 1) and of the doctrine of participation (chapter 2). Third, I explore what the potential of “being grasped” by wonder says about what it means to be human. Here, I draw upon Max Scheler’s notion of “open to the world,” but I do so with revision by speaking also of “open *by* the world.” Fourth, I offer features of a thaumatic theological anthropology, by exploring connections between wonder, faith, and desire. I argue that faith is generally expression within wonder, but when faith grows and transforms the human, wonder becomes an expression of faith, guided by faith toward God. I conclude with a

Pneumatological Note, highlighting how the Holy Spirit, in trinitarian dogmatics, is spoken of in terms of Desire. To be gifted by the Spirit is to be transformed so that human desire, expressed in faith and experienced in wonder, can be oriented toward God as its end.

The most frequent term used in the Christian New Testament for this is θαυμά (*thauma*; *lit.* “wonder,” “amazement”) and θαυμάζω (*thaumazō*; *lit.* “to wonder,” “to marvel,” “to be astonished,” or even “to admire”).⁴ This chapter offers *thaumatic* resources for deepening theological anthropology. As such, it is not seeking to construct a full portrait of the human being in theological terms. (That task is too ambitious for the present work.) Rather, it offers thaumatic sketches, lines and contours that can give a greater definition to the human person as created by God.

The Anatomy of Fundamental Theology and the Indispensability of Theological Anthropology

There is a constant balance that must be preserved when doing theology. For to speak of God, one must necessarily speak of the human. But the human-talk must be done in right relation to God. There are two extremes that can occur in theology: one is to think too much of the human capacity to know God, the other to reject the human’s role in receiving revelation. In the former, God is reduced to mere human experience, with the possible danger being that of making God in the human’s image. The latter rejects the human component of theology, with the danger being that God’s yes of revelation is in actuality a “no” to humanity. Naming Schleiermacher and Barth respectively as examples of each extreme, Rahner criticizes both distortions.⁵ There is always a human element to theology, particularly in the Christian tradition in which God is

⁴ Arndt, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 276.

⁵ Karl Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 19. He writes, “God is either the inner meaning of the world and of humanity and nothing more. Or God is the one who utterly contradicts us and our world... The first trend uses the plus sign: God is the meaning of humanity, nothing more. The other one employs the minus sign: God is the *No* addressed to humanity, nothing more.”

known precisely as God *for us*.⁶ The revealed-to is part and parcel of the revelation. Obviously, revelation also necessitates a revealer.

Rahner rightly defines theology as the “listening” to divine revelation. In doing so, he posits that theological anthropology functions as a “fundamental theology.”⁷ This of course changes the goal of philosophy of religion. Historically, philosophy of religion has served as a sort of “natural revelation,” which is “superseded later by a revealed religion.”⁸ The logical conclusion of taking this path is that philosophy of religion eventually does away with the *need* for divine revelation.⁹ Instead, the principal task of philosophy of religion is to set the context of this “listening.” It does this by establishing a metaphysical premise, namely, that God is “the one who is free and unknown”; and an anthropological premise, namely, that the “human person is *spirit*” and “precisely as spirit the human person is a *historical* being.”¹⁰ Rahner concludes, “Insofar as such a metaphysics views human persons as essentially historical beings, who *have to* listen for a possible revelation to God, the philosophy of religion becomes the sole possible natural foundation for theology.”¹¹

A fundamental theology has both theological (formally speaking) and theological anthropological starting points, and it must relate the two. It must make sense of how “mystery,” i.e. the unknowability of God, can be revealed to us. Rahner writes, “[I]t is hard to understand how such a mystery can turn into the content of our own knowledge, something to which we are intrinsically related, for which we have some kind of finality, at least in the sense that we stand

⁶ Cf. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 30 ff.

⁷ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 19; idem. *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 24 ff.

⁸ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 7, 9.

⁹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 7, 9.

¹⁰ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 9.

¹¹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 8. (Italics added for emphasis.)

open for the reception of such a revelation.”¹² Fundamental theology seeks to explain how, as *spirit*, humans can “stand open for such a ‘widening’ of our knowledge, how there is room for it in our natural makeup, without having to admit that this knowledge itself is but the necessary fulfillment of our nature.”¹³ To summarize: fundamental theology seeks to address this “widening” or “opening” that makes possible the human receiving of and “listening” to divine revelation. Therefore, fundamental theology requires both assertions about God (theology) and about humanity (theological anthropology).

A fundamental theology makes assertions regarding the *addressee* of revelation, that is, humanity. Consequently, fundamental theology makes sense of the human element of theology. It seeks to understand human beings *precisely* as creatures addressed by divine revelation. Thus, it is an indispensable part of setting the context for theology, which, as Rahner defines it, is nothing less than the *hearing* of revelation. With this said, fundamental theology must resist the tendency toward idolatry, i.e., making God in the human image. Thus, fundamental theology establishes the right relation between the hearer and speak of revelation by establishing the radical otherness and total freedom of God.

Anthropological Insight from Phenomenological Inquiry

In light of the indispensable role of theological anthropology in fundamental theology, I now turn *seriatim* to the specifically *anthropological* insights from the phenomenological and metaphysical inquiries in chapters one and two that should be named and brought to the fore. The most pronounced aspect of the phenomenological account of wonder is the notion of “being gripped” from without by wonder. Wonder is not something one controls or enacts, let alone initiates, unlike other inner faculties such as reason and imagination. Instead of the agent, the

¹² Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 13.

¹³ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 13.

human in the event of wonder is the recipient, the “object,” of wonder. The human does not act *on* wonder; wonder acts *on* the human. The human in the event of wonder can only react or respond. What comes to the fore anthropologically is not human ability, but human *availability*—what Marcel calls *disponibilité*.

Another key feature raised in the phenomenological *epoché* is the reciprocity of mutual awareness between the awareness of wondering self and awareness of the object eliciting wonder. In the moment of “being gripped,” one *simultaneously* has a heightened awareness of the object, event, or field evoking wonder and a heightened awareness of oneself. Wonder is the intensification of the outside-ness of the human’s interiority.

What must be highlighted here when exploring the human as a *theological* question is the fact that *self-awareness and self-discovery occur only in the active presence of the other*. In wonder, one is pulled out of oneself, becomes intensely attuned to the other, and in so doing one becomes intensely attuned to oneself. What is revealed therefore in wonder is a “substructure” for encountering self in and through encountering the other. One is drawn out into the presence of the other, and in doing so, one finds oneself. That is, one finds one’s self “out there,” in the grasp of the other.

Anthropological Insight from Metaphysical Inquiry

The metaphysics of participation can play a crucial *mediating* theological function in understanding the “human place in the cosmos.”¹⁴ The doctrine of participation was chosen because of its potential for grounding the identity-difference tension that surfaces in the event of wonder. (The *epoché* could uncover and describe this ontological tension but could not speak to its grounding.) Participation means that all existents share or partake in the same “higher

¹⁴ Max Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, trans. Manfred S. Frings, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2009), xvi–xvii.

principle,” even while each existent maintains its particularity and difference. After a lengthy comparative analysis, I chose participation in “being” (Aquinas: *esse*; Ibn ‘Arabī, *wujūd*) as the operative metaphysical model, though I also incorporated insights from Ibn Gabirol’s emphasis on matter.

Two extremes are prevalent, for which the doctrine of participation mitigates against two prevalent extremes in theological anthropology. One extreme posits that the human, as the pinnacle of creation, is called to have “dominion” over the rest of creation.¹⁵ Most current constructive theology on the human calls into question this metaphysical (and consequently, ethical) stance.¹⁶ Moreover, the interdependence that marks human existence, like human interdependence with and dependence on the rest of creation, demonstrates that *from the start* total “dominion” of human over non-human is impossible.

The other extreme in theological (and philosophical) anthropology that is in vogue today posits that humans are just like the rest of creation, with not even one degree of difference in value between them. Some take the even more radical stance that humans are *worse* than the rest of creation.¹⁷ To be sure, the anthropocentrism of the first extreme—the “theology of dominion”—is truly problematic. Yet, I argue that erasing human “uniqueness”¹⁸ is equally

¹⁵ Cf. Genesis 1:26.

¹⁶ Cf. Philip Clayton and Justin Heinzekehr, *Organic Marxism: An Alternative to Capitalism and Ecological Catastrophe*, Toward Ecological Civilization Series (Claremont, CA: Process Century Press, 2014), 15 ff.; Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 6 ff.; Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 14–21.

¹⁷ E.g. Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, Pelican Book, 18 (London: Pelican Books, 2018); Matthew Calarco, *Thinking through Animals: Identity, Difference, Indistinction* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Briefs, 2015). Calarco specifically discusses “antihumanisms” (29 ff.).

¹⁸ Working from an emergentist model, J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen argues for human “uniqueness” as both naturally evolving in humans and emerging from a developed and developing human culture, that grew out of evolutionary life but now has a “life of its own.” His reading is put in dialogue with traditional Christian claims, while seeking to maintain the integrity of each discipline, that is, of the biological sciences and of Christian theology. See his *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology*, Religion, Theologie und Naturwissenschaft, Bd. 6. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

problematic. Anthropocentrism as *dominion* leads to “presumption,” but misanthropy leads to “despair.”¹⁹

A proper theological anthropology, therefore, should affirm qualitative identity and qualitative difference between humanity and the rest of creation. Human uniqueness must be articulated from the backdrop of humanity’s solidarity and shared enfleshment with the rest of the cosmos. Moreover, this anthropic uniqueness has the potential for both good and ill, as any cursory overview of human history will make clear. Yet it is not anthropic uniqueness but how this uniqueness is lived out in the world that is the issue. The theological anthropology of “dominion” in the first creation account is followed by the theological anthropology of “tilling”²⁰ in the second creation account. Thus, the ethic of *service and care*, and not of domination, marks human uniqueness as well. Both extremes in theological anthropology (presumption and despair) are dangerous and untenable.

The doctrine of participation metaphysically grounds both tension between identity and difference, which are jointly constitutive of the experience of wonder. The notion of participation serves a balancing and mediating function in the construction of a proper theological anthropology. The experience of wonder reveals both identity and difference, both solidarity and distinction. Humanity maintains an identity with the rest of creation, since all existents share in *being* by participation. Yet, the doctrine of participation also affirms difference and distinction in that each existent participates in being in proportion to its essence. The existence of a thing corresponds to its quintessence.

¹⁹ Anselm K. Min, “The Humanity of Theology: Aquinian Reflections of the Presumption and Despair in the Human Claim to Know God,” *Rethinking the Medieval Legacy for Contemporary Theology*, ed. Anselm K. Min (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 167–96. Min’s subject in his essay is theology as such, not theological anthropology specifically. Yet what he asserts concerning the “humanity of theology” can be analogously applied to the theology of humanity.

²⁰ Cf. Genesis 2:15.

In summary, the doctrine of participation serves as a mediating function when properly placing humanity with the totality of created existence. It tempers human presumption by positing that human beings do not in themselves possess the power to be, but must participate, alongside all created beings, in being. Yet, there are dimensions to being that only humans can discern (or can do so in the most intense way), namely, truth (intellect), goodness (desire), and beauty (order).

This picture of reality, structured by the doctrine of participation, must primordially inform all theological anthropological exploration, for participation balances the portrait of humanity within the broader landscape of created reality. Affirming the doctrine of participation as the shared ground of being for both human and non-human beings rules out both presumption and despair. Kathryn Tanner writes,

[T]heological anthropology lodges an attack on both over- and under-valuations of human life, fostering instead a humble but healthy self-respect. Human life is genuinely valuable but not absolutely or unquestionably so in a way that would make all other beings in the universe mere means to human well-being.²¹

The doctrine of participation grounds such a balanced picture of reality as whole and of humanity's unique place within it. It also grounds the ontological tension that marks the experience of wonder.

Being Grasped by the World: Opened to the World or by the World?

Foundational to the experience of wonder is the potentiality or *disponibilité* (Marcel) to be “grasped” by the world outside oneself. This *disponibilité* simultaneously highlights human receptivity and things’ active “presencing,” or at least their capacity to actively “presence.” I suggested that the wonder goes against the grain of the phenomenological account of human interaction with the world. Wonder is not a phenomenological reduction, i.e., “to the things

²¹ Kathryn Tanner, “The Difference Theological Anthropology Makes,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4 (1994): 579.

themselves”; wonder is “*from* the things themselves.” This shifts the conversation from “skillful coping” of human agency,²² to human “openness” to the agency of things and fields. In the former, humans act; in the latter, humans are acted upon.

What then does it mean to be “open” to the agency of one’s field of experience? The notion of “world-openness” plays a central role in Max Scheler’s philosophical anthropology.²³ As I explore in this section, this Schelerian principle is useful in exploring what it means to be human through the lens of wonder. Yet, I revise the idea so that the dynamic of world-openness captures the inverse flow of wonder: from human-to-world to world-to-human.

For Scheler, what distinguishes the human animal from other forms of organic life is that the human is also “spirit” (a traditional term that Scheler adopts but revises for his purposes²⁴) and thus is open *to* the world.²⁵ What does “spirit” mean for him? Scheler writes, “[T]he ultimate determination of a being with spirit [i.e. the human]... is its *existential detachment from organic being*.” By this he means that the human is not bound “to the drives and environment, but is ‘non-environmental’ or, as I prefer to put it, ‘world-open.’” It is in this sense that the “being-with-spirit” “has” a world.²⁶ Being-with-spirit can see the whole, including self, from a “no-place.”

²² Hubert L. Dreyfus, “Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise (2005),” in *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action*, ed. Mark A Wrathall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 104 ff.

²³ Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, 28 ff.; cf. idem., *On the Eternal in Man* (New York: Harper, 1961).

²⁴ Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, xiii–xvii, 35 ff. A Schelerian reframing of the term “spirit” is later utilized in theology by Karl Rahner and Wolfhart Pannenberg. See, for example: Karl Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, trans. William V. Dych, Marquette Studies in Theology (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968); and, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1985).

²⁵ Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, 27.

²⁶ Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, 27.

Scheler is not advocating for a sterile objectivity that entirely escapes localized embodiment. Rather, he maintains a dialectic between human being as “organic” life in this world and as spirit “above” the world. The organic human lives in the world; the spiritual human “has” a world. The human not only rises above “its basic given centers of ‘resistance’ and reaction to its environment.” The human can “turn its centers of resistance and reaction into ‘objects’ in order to grasp the ‘what’ of all objects itself.”²⁷ That is to say: the human spirit has the capacity to “experience all entities... as *objects*,” including space, time, and the cosmos *as a whole*. This implies that the human place cannot be in the cosmos of space and time. It is “nowhere”; yet this “nowhere” is always “relative to whatever is ‘somewhere’ as objectified by spirit.”²⁸

Although the basic premise of Scheler’s “world openness” is affirmed, it cannot, as is, *fully* account for the experience of wonder wherein the human is the *object*, and not the subject. World openness speaks to the human being open *to* the world, but in being grasped by wonder, the human is opened *by* the world. In the event of wonder, the world—a part of or moment in the world—is the “subject” acting on the human.

To be sure, there are later stages of wonder when the human actively responds to the field, event, or object soliciting her wonder-filled gaze. In those responsive stages, one claims one’s agency, and investigates or actively contemplates. Yet, one’s agency is always *in response* to wonder, and the wonder remains ungraspable by the human. Maintaining the sense of wonder

²⁷ Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, 27.

²⁸ Rahner’s notion of transcendentalism seems to be informed by this Schelerian openness, since both affirm the dialectic of the “no-where” of transcendentalism (Rahner) or spirit and the “hereness” of “history” (Rahner) and “organic/biological life” (Scheler). For Rahner’s articulation of “transcendentalism” and “history,” see *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 19–21, 31–35, 39–43. Elsewhere, Rahner writes, “We exist in a world of beings that are our objects. We stand not only in an ‘environment’ as part of it, as determined by it; to be human is to have a world, which we oppose to ourselves, from which we detach ourselves, in thought and in action” (*Hearer of the Word*, 42).

through the investigative or contemplative exercise is not determined or controlled by the human. It is the classic cat-and-mouse situation—except the cat (human) can never lay hold of the mouse (wonder). Wonder may “leave” at any moment. About the “highest points” of human history, Scheler declares, “Short and rare is what is beautiful, in its tenderness and vulnerability.”²⁹ Wonder, likewise, can be this volatile. Short and rare is what is *wonderful*, in its tenderness and vulnerability!

With this in mind, one can speak of the human as a being with the disposition *to be opened by* the excess-within of the world. In another essay, “Idealism and Realism,”³⁰ Scheler lays the “theoretical foundations” that implicitly undergirded his well-known book, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*.³¹ In it, he seems to come close to my intent here, that is, of reversing the flow of openness. He does so by speaking of a yearning to “open oneself.” He writes, “Sensation and perceiving presuppose an instinctive yearning to ‘open oneself’ to the external world, or, at the very least, [to] presuppose the drive to be awake [*Wachtrieb*].”³² Yet even here, the human yearns to open him- or herself.

I propose the following modification. Rather than “yearn to open oneself” to encounter the world, I assert that wonder opens up the human and reveals an inherent yearning to know and to be known. Wonder is not one’s yearning to open oneself epistemically in order to experience and know the world as a whole and to know one’s self in that world; rather, wonder is the world opening up one’s self and as a result discovering one’s epistemic yearning to know and be

²⁹ Scheler, *The Human Place in the Cosmos*, 47.

³⁰ Scheler, “Idealism and Realism,” in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 288–356.

³¹ David Lachterman, “Translator’s Introduction,” in Scheler, *Selected Philosophical Essays*, xxxvi.

³² Max Scheler, “Idealism and Realism,” in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 322.

known. In wonder, one is opened up *by way of the other in order to know oneself*. One discovers oneself, *through the world*, as a being with a desire to know and be known.

In this sense, the potentiality for the world to open up the human is more accurately grasped by Plessner's "exocentricity."³³ Plessner rejects the closed-in interior ego of the human proposed by the psychology of his time. Instead he speaks of the human "core" being "not only with themselves but at the same time outside themselves."³⁴ As exocentric beings, humans can distance themselves from themselves;³⁵ consequently, they can also be present to the other "as other."³⁶ This exocentricity can be inferred in Rahner's transcendentality³⁷ in that "self-reflection" is the "original condition" from which the capacity for objectivity and knowledge of reality is derived.³⁸ Plessner writes, "Being positioned exocentrically, humans beings stand where they stand and at the same time do not stand where they stand."³⁹ Therefore to discover oneself *fully*, there is a necessary "stepping out" that is integral to self-knowledge.

If one accepts this exocentric reality, then *wonder is not a luxury or amenity of life*. Rather, *wonder is indispensable and necessary*. As exocentric person, one is a "place" within and beyond one's bodily limits. Therefore, in order to know oneself, one must be opened by the world, since part of one's "center" is *out there*, "in the world." In order to discover one's desire to know and to be known, one must be opened by the world. This is the work of wonder.

³³ Maarten Coolen, "Bodily Experience and Experiencing One's Body," in *Plessner's Philosophical Anthropology: Perspectives and Prospects*, ed. Jos de Mul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 111–27; Helmuth Plessner, *Political Anthropology*, trans. Nils F Schott, ed. Heike Delitz and Robert Seyfert, Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 54 ff.

³⁴ In Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 37.

³⁵ In Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 63–64.

³⁶ In Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 62.

³⁷ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, A Crossroad Paperback (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 19–21.

³⁸ In Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 37.

³⁹ In Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 67.

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, wonder heightens one's awareness of the other *and* of one's self. The human is not absorbed by the other, nor is the other ignored by one's being intensely aware of one's self. Both happen simultaneously in the event of wonder, thus revealing both similitude and difference, solidarity and otherness. If one's center is "out there," then wonder is necessary to discover one's center and one's yearning to be, to know and to be known.⁴⁰ Phrased differently, the experience of wonder is how humans discern the core of their being (i.e. their "center") as yearning to know and to be known.

Human Openness as the Unity of Being and Knowing

As stated above, wonder is thoroughly "wujudian." In wonder, being and knowing intensify each other. As wujudian experience, it reveals what Rahner calls the "luminosity of being," and in faith, it leads to the God of light and life. Thus, wonder is at the core of the encounter with God and not just one's self or the world. As Rahner argues, to inquire about "*all* being" indicates that "the nature of being is to know and to be known in an original unity."⁴¹ The metaphysical question about being as such "is already the affirmation of the fundamental intelligibility of all beings." He adds, "Beings and possible objects of knowledge are identical," which implies that every being has "an intrinsic ordination to possible knowledge and so to a possible knower."⁴² The very "core" of being is "self-presence" or "luminosity."⁴³

Rahner's nuanced articulation of "original unity" is key to understanding how knowledge of self and of the world as a whole leads to the experience of God. The identity of being and

⁴⁰ It is telling that in neither creation account in the Torah (Genesis 1:1–2:4a and Genesis 2:4b–25) is the human created first. Rather, humans are from the start in relation to their place in the world and are defined by their relation to the world.

⁴¹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 28.

⁴² Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 29. Here Rahner refers to Aquinas' *omne ens est verum* ['every being is true'].

⁴³ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 28.

knowing implies that every being, because of its being, is knowing. Yet, this is possible if being and knowing “constitute an original *unity*.”⁴⁴ But he also affirms the Scholastic distinction that *Non denim plura secundum se uniuntur* [‘Many things do not constitute a unity by themselves’].⁴⁵ Thus something else is needed. Being and knowing are related originally because “in their ground, they are the same reality.”⁴⁶

Human uniqueness is affirmed in the two particular ways that being and knowing are united in human beings. First, human being can return to itself completely, unlike other beings. Rahner calls this “self-presence,” and Aquinas calls it *reditio subjecti in seipsum* [‘the return of the subject into itself’].⁴⁷ Rahner writes, “A being possesses being to the extent that it possesses the possibility of such a *reditio subjecti in seipsum*.”⁴⁸ When one steps out of oneself in “grasping the things,” one returns completely into oneself *as subject*. One remains distinct from the things grasped in one’s stepping out.⁴⁹ The human person possesses the highest potentiality to return to the self because “the *degree* of self-presence, of luminosity for oneself, corresponds to the intensity of being, to the *degree* in which, notwithstanding its non-being, a being shares in being.”⁵⁰

The second way that human uniqueness is affirmed is by the human capacity to “reach out for more.”⁵¹ In stepping out with the senses, one is aware that “quiddities” of the things experienced are limitations to the things. Yet the awareness of this limitation makes known to us “the limitlessness which belongs to the quiddity as such.” Thus, Rahner assert, “This is possible

⁴⁴ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 29.

⁴⁵ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 29.

⁴⁶ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 29.

⁴⁷ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 33.

⁴⁸ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 33.

⁴⁹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 42.

⁵⁰ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 37.

⁵¹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 47.

only if the activity that grasps this individual sense object reaches out, prior to this grasping, beyond this individual object, for more than the latter is.” This “more,” he adds, “can only be the absolute range of all knowable objects as such.”⁵²

Rahner deploys the term *Vorgriff* [lit. ‘anticipation’, ‘expectation’] to speak of this “reaching out for more.” This *Vorgriff* is “an *a priori* power” as the core of the human being. This “anticipation” is the “movement of the spirit toward the absolute range all possible object.” Meaning, each object known “is always already known under the horizon of the absolute ideal of knowledge and posited within the conscious domain of all that which may be known.”⁵³ As “conscious,” this *Vorgriff* makes the human aware “by opening up the horizon” within which any and all human knowledge is known.⁵⁴ An anticipatory reaching out is at the core of human being.

Lastly, since this *Vorgriff* opens up the horizon for all human knowing, Rahner posits that this *Vorgriff* does not reach out to “nothingness” (as Heidegger posited) but to the “infinity of being.” In other words, it opens up for human knowing that which is “beyond the field of spatiotemporal sense intuition.” This human epistemological anticipation is “toward being as unlimited in itself.”⁵⁵ Therefore this *Vorgriff*, this anticipation, is at the core of what it means to be human.⁵⁶

Therefore, this limitlessness of human anticipation, which is “the basic makeup of human existence,”⁵⁷ is what makes possible the human encounter with God, for it allows us to “co-affirm” the “infinite being of God.”⁵⁸ Rahner does qualify this by stating,

⁵² Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 47.

⁵³ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 47–48.

⁵⁴ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 48.

⁵⁵ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 50.

⁵⁶ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 49–50.

⁵⁷ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 50.

⁵⁸ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 51.

It is true that the *Vorgriff* does not immediately put God as an object before the mind, since, as the condition of the possibility of all knowledge of objects, the *Vorgriff* as the necessary and always already fulfilled condition of every human knowledge and action, the existence of an absolute being, hence of God, is always already co-affirmed, even though not represented.⁵⁹

Since *Vorgriff* affirms that which “may come to stand in its range,” such “an absolute being would wholly fill the range of the *Vorgriff*.” Thus, the *Vorgriff* “aims at God.”⁶⁰ This is what we call our “spiritual nature.”⁶¹ An anticipatory reaching out is at the core of human being, and the grasping is infinite.

The Desirous Dance of Wonder: The Human and the Other Mutually Grasping

One quickly notes how wonder might both confirm and expand Rahner’s theological anthropology. Wonder is a luminous event, for it reveals to the human being the shared being with the world that grasps one, that calls one out of oneself where one’s center is. If one is constituted as *subject* by one’s stepping out to grasp the world and by one’s return to oneself, then *wonder is the movement of stepping out and return*, but it is a movement *that begins “outside” the self*.

Is there a term for this “movement”? Yes. The word is *desire*. Wonder is an epistemic desire that is at the core of human being. Wonder is an epistemic *yearning*; it is anticipatory desire. To be human therefore is to desire to know and to be known. It is not simply the capacity or ability to do so. It is the *yearning* to do so.

⁵⁹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 51.

⁶⁰ Rahner explains, “To be human is to be spirit [*Der Mensch its Geist*], i.e., to live life while reaching ceaselessly for the absolute, in openness toward God. And this openness toward God is not something that may happen or not happen to us once in a while, as we please. It is the condition of the possibility of what we are and have to be and always also are in our most humdrum daily life. Only that makes us human: that we are always already on the way to God, whether or not we know it expressly, whether or not we will it. We are forever the infinite openness of the finite for God.” (Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 53.)

⁶¹ Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 51, 53.

Yet wonder adds one crucial step prior to the human's anticipating desire. The O/other (world, neighbor, field, etc.) does the first initial grasping, and not the human, since wonder is *prior* to the human's "anticipatory reaching out." The O/other grasps the human first. This is a significant alternation not simply to Rahner, but to other proponents of human anthropologies of relation and openness.⁶²

Wonder *re-*places desire amidst creation, and not simply within the human. By this I mean that the desire to be known is found in the cosmos,⁶³ though, unlike human being, the desire or ability to know and return back to itself is not found in the cosmos to the degree that is found in humans. The Medieval thinkers in chapter two did not overlook this element of desire in being. Ibn Gabirol names desire explicitly as the substructure of being, when he poetically declares in *Keter Malkhūt* (*Kingdom's Crown*),

You are wise, and your wisdom gave rise
to an endless desire *in the world*...⁶⁴

Yet it is also found in Aquinas' notion of goodness and Ibn 'Arabī's notion of mercy. Each in his own way identified this sense of epistemic desire as constitutive of being as such. The cosmos *anticipates* [as in *Vorgriff/vorgreifen*] as well.

The image of dancing more accurately describes the desirous movement of wonder. In the event of wonder, the O/other leads, and enthralled by wonder, the human follows. The other

⁶² Cf. F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003).

⁶³ For centuries, Indian philosophies have been espousing the idea that the universe's consciousness is 'activated' in and through human consciousness. For example, see Amit Goswami, *The Self-Aware Universe: How Consciousness Creates the Material World* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1995). Ivone Gebara, drawing from this Indian wisdom, refers to humanity as the "thinking dimension" of the universe. In Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 67.

⁶⁴ In Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire*, 42. (Italics added for emphasis.)

grasps the human, and the human, in response to the music and poetry,⁶⁵ holds on. (In moments of dread, the image can be of wrestling.) There is a mutual grasping. Wonder is the dance itself, a dance that requires two dancers.

The exocentric structure of the self fits well within this image of dancing. The dancer is both the body and the dance she creates with someone else. The dance is found in each dancer and in their “betweenness.” This betweenness is neither purely subjective, nor entirely objective; nor is it “some stellar space existing independently.”⁶⁶ Lévinas speaks instead of an “ontology of Interval, or the ‘between.’”⁶⁷ In this ‘between,’ “the utmost transcendence is bound to the utmost particularity of the terms.”⁶⁸ The dancers not only jointly constitute the dance; they jointly constitute each other *as dancers*. One’s epistemic desire is to be found *in the other because the other is constitutive of the self*. The *first* grasp of wonder is what initiates human grasping. Therefore, the human’s *first* grasp is always “in response”⁶⁹ to the grasp of the other.⁷⁰ To rephrase the assertion made in the previous section: *A responsive reaching out is at the core of human being (in response of being grasped by the O/other), and the grasping is infinite.*

Lévinas’ notion of “summons” is appropriate here.⁷¹ The “face” of the other “signifies in the fact of summoning.” What the faces summons, adds Levinas, is *me*. With wonder, this Levinasian “summons” is not simply an anthropological “face.” Rather the “face” that summons

⁶⁵ Santayana writes, “It does not seem to me ignominious to be a poet, if nature has made one a poet unexpectedly. Unexpectedly nature lent us existence, and if she has made it a condition that we should be poets, she has not forbidden us to enjoy that art, or even to be proud of it” (*Scepticism and Animal Faith*, 96).

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Lévinas, “Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge,” in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Seán Hand, Blackwell Readers (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1989), 65.

⁶⁷ Lévinas, “Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge,” 65.

⁶⁸ Lévinas, “Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge,” 65.

⁶⁹ Cf. David B. Burrell, *Learning to Trust in Freedom: Signs from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Traditions* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2010), xv.

⁷⁰ Lévinas, “Beyond Intentionality,” 111. One can read Lévinas as undoing Sartre’s ontology by reversing it. Against Sartre, the human is first being-for-others, which constitutes their being-for-itself. Finally, in reflection, the human recognizes being-in-itself (Cf. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 24–32, 119 ff., 301 ff.).

⁷¹ Lévinas, “Beyond Intentionality,” 112.

includes the cosmos itself, as sum and whole. It is a *cosmic* face that constitutively summons the human. The second creation account in the Torah⁷² captures this beautifully by depicting *adam* (אָדָם: “human,” “earthling”) as made out of *adamah* (אֲדָמָה: “dirt,” “earth”). Wonder is the cosmos “summoning” the self: it summons one outside of oneself so that one finds oneself outside of oneself. Wonder unearths the human by re-earthing the human. For this reason, ‘betweenness’ is, for Lévinas, “*the* fundamental category of being.”⁷³

The other initiates the dance of wonder, but the dance is not actualized without the unique response of the human. For this reason, Lévinas adds that the human being is “the locus where the act of being [whose fundamental category is ‘betweenness’] is being acted.” The human is “the articulation of the meeting.”⁷⁴ The cosmos does initiate the desirous, epistemic dance, but only the human can hum and sing along to the music. Only the human can give expression [Lévinas’ ‘articulation’] to the “rhyme and reason” of the cosmic dance.

The Human as Created Being: Faith as Form of Wonder...

To ask how wonder is related to God is to ask how wonder is related to *faith*. I am using the word “faith” here as the human response to the grace of God, and not as “*the* Faith” as in the articles of belief (i.e. Creed), nor as the “spiritual gift.”⁷⁵ To be clear, the question regards faith *in God*, not faith generically.⁷⁶ What is their relationship? How are they the same? How do they differ? Or is one a type of the other: are all experiences of wonder a type of faith, or vice versa?

⁷² Genesis 2:4b–25.

⁷³ Lévinas, “Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge,” 65. (Italics added for emphasis.)

⁷⁴ Lévinas, “Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge,” 66. He writes, “[T]he interval between the I and Thou is inseparable from the adventure in which the individual himself participates, yet is more objective than any other type of objectivity, precisely because of the personal adventure.” (65)

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:9.

⁷⁶ It is common for apologists to point out, for example, an atheist naturalist’s “faith in science.” But here what is being explored is faith *in God*, not faith in some other “ultimate.”

There are three striking similarities between faith and wonder. First, both involve the capacity to perceive by way of the internal or external faculties (e.g. sight, memory). As the Preacher in Hebrews declares, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”⁷⁷ Von Balthasar speaks of the “eye of faith.”⁷⁸ Although faith is “to believe what you do not see,”⁷⁹ the “unseen” is mediated by the “seen.” Augustine says, “Believe in Him whom you do not see because of the things which you do see.”⁸⁰

Second, both faith and wonder involve not simply “seeing,” but “seeing” the generous excess of the O/other. If the excess-within of creation alludes to the transcendental Excess that grounds it, then logically wonder and faith are related experiences. The Preacher concurs, and adds his own definition of faith: “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.”⁸¹ To affirming a grounding transcendental Excess from the excess-within of creation is an act of faith, an act in some way mediated by the experience of wonder.

Third, the ontological tension between identity and difference of wonder is also present in genuine faith. In wonder, one is vividly aware, in a heightened manner, of the other eliciting wonder *and* of oneself. As stated above, fundamental theology has two necessary poles: God who addresses humanity and humanity as addressed by God. The Christian tradition speaks of identity and difference in terms of humanity made “in the image of God,”⁸² and of God as radically free and ontologically distinct from the rest of creation. A balance in theology and in

⁷⁷ Hebrews 11:1.

⁷⁸ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord, Vol. 1: Seeing The Form* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 190.

⁷⁹ Augustine of Hippo, “Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen,” in *Seventeen Short Treatises of S. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, Vol. 22 (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1847), 3.

⁸⁰ In M. J. Charlesworth, *Philosophy of Religion: The Historic Approaches*, Philosophy of Religion Series (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 52.

⁸¹ Hebrews 11:3.

⁸² Genesis 1:26.

faith, about which theology speaks, is delicate and must avoid pantheism and idolatry on one extreme, and a total, deistic disconnect on the other.

In the experience of God, one encounters both God as “wholly Other” (and *holy* Other) and oneself as intimately made by and for God. Indeed, the dialectical poles of theology are the same as those of creation itself: creation is not God, yet is totally dependent on God.⁸³ In other words, any theological claim is possible *precisely because humans are created by God*. The experience of God is similar to the experience of wonder because both are based on ontological tensions of sorts between identity or identification and difference or otherness.

The great mystics speak of their experiences of God in such a manner. Augustine declares this tension by speaking of humans as “made *for*” (and not just made *by*) God, and of God as radically other. With the same breath he asserts both, “[Y]ou have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you,” and, “What place is there in me where my God may enter in, where that same God who made heaven and earth may enter into me?”⁸⁴ Hildegard of Bingen distinguishes between the “self” and the “marvels of God.” The musical “tones” of divine marvels are not brought forth from the soul. The self is like a “chord” that when played by the Musician, i.e. God, emits marvelous sounds.⁸⁵ Von Balthasar also captures this tension when he asserts, “If God wishes to reveal the love that he harbors for the world, this love has to be something that the world can recognize, in spite of, or in fact in, its being wholly other.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.45.3.

⁸⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, ed. Carolyn J. B. Hammond, trans. William Watts, Loeb Classical Library, 26-27 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), I.1–2.

⁸⁵ In Matthew Fox, *Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen*, Practical Ecology Series (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1985), 116.

⁸⁶ In Antonio López, “Eternal Happening: God as an Event of Love,” in *Love Alone Is Credible: Hans Urs Von Balthasar as Interpreter of the Catholic Tradition*, ed. David L. Schindler, Ressourcement (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 83.

This ontological tension is found as well in Islamic and Jewish mysticism. Ibn Gabirol captures this tension between the otherness of God and the human orientation toward this Other in his famous poem, “My Soul Shall Declare,” where the soul acknowledges God as the ontologically-prior maker of “her” existence, and yet as the One upon whom she “gazes.”⁸⁷ In keeping with the Jewish mystical tradition, Abraham Joshua Heschel captures this when he aptly speaks of faith as an “intense craving” and a “yearning” to being united with God “who is beyond the mystery.” He writes, “At the root of our yearning for integrity is a stir of the inexpressible with us to commune with the ineffable beyond us.”⁸⁸ The Noble Qur’ān proclaims God the transcendent creator of the human who is nevertheless “closer to him than (his) jugular vein.”⁸⁹ Because God is radically Other, Ibn ‘Arabī posits that to grow close to God is to “increase my perplexity concerning Thee!”⁹⁰

Again, faith and wonder are noticeably similar in three ways. Both involve the perceptual capacity by way of the internal or external faculties. Both faith and wonder involve “seeing” the generous excess of the O/other. And, the ontological tension between identity and difference of wonder is present in both the experience of wonder and the faithful experience of God. Based in the three general similarities between faith and wonder, what can be said of their relation?

The human capacity for faith is grounded in (i.e. dependent upon) the human availability to wonder. The “avenue” taken by faith is the one taken by wonder. That avenue is desire to

⁸⁷ Ibn Gabirol, “My Soul Shall Declare,” in *Selected Religious Poems of Solomon Ibn Gabirol*, trans. Israel Zangwill (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1974), 3, 4.

⁸⁸ Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone*, 175.

⁸⁹ Qur’ān, *Al-Basīqat* 50.16.

⁹⁰ Ibn Al-‘Arabī, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, trans. R. W. J Austin, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 79.

know and to be known. The anthropological substructure of desire that makes wonder available to humans, i.e. openness-to, is the same substructure that makes having faith possible.

Should one then equate faith with wonder? This possibility for identity should be explored. The human needs the availability to wonder to have the capacity for faith. Yet the inverse is not true: one can have no *intentional*⁹¹ commitment to God and still be available to wonder. One need only read noted atheists or agnostic astrophysicists who speak of the cosmos to see that wonder may be experienced and beautifully expressed *without* intentional faith in God.⁹²

Hence one can say—*provisionally* for now—that faith is contained within wonder since faith is wonder directed at God alone, whereas wonder is directed at any and all “other,” including God. There is a difference of intentionality (in the phenomenological sense). It can therefore be said that faith is a form of wonder.

In fact, defining faith is extremely helpful and elucidating, since in the act of wonder, as in the act of faith, the human is not the subject but the object. Thus, faith as a type of wonder wards off pantheisms and idolatrous mistakes of reducing God as something entirely subjective. To have faith in God is grasping one’s “being grasped” by God. Genuine experience of God is coming face-to-face with the excessive grace of God that grasps one in reverent awe. Faith is the being overwhelmed by the generosity of God, a generosity that grounds all experience of wonder. Like wonder, the self being gripped by God is not entirely overcome or annihilated.⁹³ As

⁹¹ Rahner posits that the experience of God is “present at hand” to all humanity regardless of faith commitment (or lack thereof), but it is present in an “unthematic and anonymous” way. (Cf. *Foundations of Christian Faith*, 21, 51–52) The faith discussed in this section is “thematic” and intentional.

⁹² For example, see Stephen Hawking, “Is There a God?,” in *Brief Answers to the Big Questions* (New York: Bantam Books, 2018), 23–37.

⁹³ In Sufi metaphysics, there is the notion of *fanā’* (“annihilation”). According to Sulṭān Bāhū, Rūmī and others, it means “to die before one dies” (alluding to a well-known Hadith) *Fanā’* denotes the deconstruction of the *isolated* self or ego, and the affirmation of fundamental unity of God (*tawḥīd*), creation, and the self. Some have

one is wonderfully aware of God's gripping presence, one is more aware of one's true self as created by God—that is, loved into existence and drawn to God in faith. As the psalmist declares, “Know that the Lord is God. | It is he that made us, and we are his.”⁹⁴ Being present to the Other establishes one's self-presence.

...And the Human as Recreated Being: Wonder as a Form of Faith

Above, I provisionally stated that faith is a form of wonder, that it is contained within the realm of wonder, and that the inverse is not so, that faith is a form of wonder. Yet is this automatically so? Is this true in all cases?

It was likewise asserted that faith is contained within wonder since faith is wonder directed at God alone, whereas wonder is directed at any and all “others,” including God. But what if one affirms that God is the “ground” of all being? That “the world, things, and human beings have come to be penetrated by the generous sap of God”?⁹⁵ That God is the “organizing principle” for understanding all existence, that is, that all things are to be “treated of under the aspect of God [*sub ratione Dei*]”?⁹⁶ What if one affirms, in faith, that a transcendental Excess, a divine generosity, is what grounds the excess-within, the generous *being*, of creation?

When one is transformed by the grasping love of God, the relation of faith and wonder becomes inverted. Wonder becomes a form of faith. The experience of wonder becomes an

taken this to mean that the human subject is deemed entirely valueless within Sufi metaphysics. Yet, this is not so. As with Ibn 'Arabī, it is through *fanā* that one truly “knows [one-]self.” Therefore, what *fanā* “annihilates” is not the self as such, but an isolationist vision of the self with no reference to God. See: Sulṭān Bāhū, *Death Before Dying: The Sufi Poems of Sultan Bahu.*, ed. and trans. Jamal J. Elias (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 21; William Harmless, “Mysticism and Islam: Rumi,” in *Mystics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 160–88; Ibn 'Arabī, *Know Yourself: An Explanation of the Oneness of Being*, trans. Cecilia Twinch (Cheltenham, UK: Beshara Publications, 2011).

⁹⁴ Psalm 100:3; cf. Psalm 139:13–18.

⁹⁵ Leonardo Boff, *Sacraments of Life: Life of the Sacraments*, Story Theology (Washington, D.C.: Pastoral Press, 1987), 4.

⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.1.7.

experience of faith. The awesome reality of creation becomes what Patrick Masterson calls a “cypher of transcendence.”⁹⁷ Wonder matures as faith matures, but paradoxically, in the process of maturation, the latter subsumes the former. In fact, when transformed by the grasp of grace, there is no longer any “substantial” difference between the experiences of wonder and faith. In his *Apology for Wonder*, Sam Keen proposes that wonder/awe and faith are *essentially* the same. But he does not assert the caveat I assert here: that their similarity is due to a recreation in faith.⁹⁸ It is only as the human is recreated in their faith in God that such wonder and faith can be identified and that the former becomes an expression and manifestation of the latter.

Daniel L. Migliore’s treatment of sanctification as “maturation” and “growth” is insightful for understanding the faith-wonder dynamic, even if he does not speak directly of wonder. According to him, sanctification is the “process of growth in Christian love” that is marked by a “maturing” as “hearers of the Word of God,” “in gratitude,” and “in solidarity” with others and creation.⁹⁹ Using the language of excess, wonder, and generosity, one can say that sanctification means: maturing as perceivers of the transcendental Excess that grounds the excess-within of creation; maturing in gratitude for the Generosity that gifts existence to the person and to all creation; and, maturing in being wholly available and open to the other.

⁹⁷ Patrick Masterson argues that although the doctrine of creation and its embedded assertion of the asymmetrical relation between the world and God is a *theological* affirmation, there are “cyphers of transcendence” that point to this asymmetrical relationship “in our pre-philosophical lived experience.” See his *Sense of Creation: Experience and the God Beyond*, Ashgate Philosophy of Religion Series (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2008), i, 2.

⁹⁸ Keen, *Apology for Wonder*, 35.

⁹⁹ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 250–56.

Holy Spirit as Desire and Humans as Temples of the Spirit

In transformation, faith leads wonder through the avenue of desire, rightly directing desire toward its ordered end.¹⁰⁰ Faith directs the desire operative in wonder—that is, the desire to know and to be known—toward God as the goal of humanity. This is a desire for the good, and thus, wonder is in this sense grace. Juan Luis Segundo asserts, “Grace is undoubtedly an attraction toward the good.”¹⁰¹

Trinitarian dogmatics appropriates to the Holy Spirit the name of divine desire, and the Holy Spirit as the agent who sanctifies people of faith into “temples” of the Spirit.¹⁰² If transformation is the right ordering of desire, then it is also the right ordering of wonder. The Holy Spirit “does not wish to be seen but to be the seeing eye of grace in us.”¹⁰³ Wonder, informed by faith, is the “seeing eye” that reveals the transcendental Excess of an excessive creation. The Holy Spirit is the “Gift,” given by the “Giver” (Father), through the one “Given” (Son).¹⁰⁴

The Gift of Desire reorients human desire toward the Triune God. The Holy Spirit is therefore a Gift to humanity, and the Giver of gifts which transform humans toward the Good. The experience of wonder acclimates the human to faith in God. Thus, wonder and faith are “gifts” of the Spirit: the former given in creation; the latter, in recreation.

¹⁰⁰ Aquinas asserts that “all creatures are ordered to Him” (*Summa Theologica*, I.13.7).

¹⁰¹ Segundo, *Grace and the Human Condition*, 19.

¹⁰² Cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19.

¹⁰³ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology*, vol. 3: Creator Spirit (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1993), 111.

¹⁰⁴ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 139, 141, 153; cf. Augustine, *The Trinity (De trinitate)*, 2nd Edition, ed. Edmund Hill, Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1990), V.3; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.38.1–2.

Conclusion

This chapter explored thaumatic sketches of a theological anthropology, that is, theological insights into the human based on wonder (excess-within) and the metaphysics of generosity (transcendental Excess). I argued that the capacity for wonder is an anticipatory reaching out that is at the core of human being in response to be grasped by the O/other, and that reaching out is infinite. Such an understanding of wonder makes wonder indispensable to a theological account of the human generally, and of the human act of faith in God specifically. Thus, wonder is not a luxury or amenity of life. Rather, wonder is indispensable and necessary. After defending the indispensable role of theological anthropology for theology as such, I gleaned key anthropological features both of the phenomenological description of wonder and of the doctrine of participation.

Anchoring the study on the human potentiality of “being grasped” by wonder, I revised Max Scheler’s notion of being “open to the world,” arguing that humans, primordially, are “opened *by* the world.” What emerges is the image of dancing as a more accurate account for the desirous movement of wonder. In the event of wonder, the O/other leads, and enthralled by wonder, the human follows. The other grasps the human, and the human, in response to the music and poetry, holds on. In holding on, the human can “articulate” that wonder with and for creation.

This led to an exploration of faith vis-à-vis wonder. Faith is generally expression within wonder, but when faith grows and transforms the human, wonder becomes an expression of faith, guided by faith toward God. The Holy Spirit is the Gift of Desire, who in faith transforms human desire, expressed in faith and experienced in wonder, and orients it toward God as its end.

Ending this chapter's discussion with the Holy Spirit is intentional for it leads to that next and last chapter. In the following essay, I argue for Christian praxis as a praxis of generosity. For this "charismatic" (as in *charis*, 'gift') presupposition, I explore liturgy and liberation through a theo-thaumatic anthropological lens. I propose that worship and the struggle for justice are "sacramental axes"¹⁰⁵ that doxologically and prophetically proclaim the God of generosity and excessive love for all of creation. To this liturgical and ethical exploration, we now turn.

¹⁰⁵ Boff, *Sacraments of Life*, 55 ff.

Chapter 4

Christian Praxis as Praxis of Generosity: Some Wondrous Reflections on the Christian Life, Liturgy, and Liberation

*[Refrain:] Make us worthy to approach Your Gift in awe!
...In Your Bread there is hidden the Spirit who is not consumed,
in your Wine there dwells the Fire that is not drunk:
the Spirit is in Your Bread, the Fire in Your Wine—
a manifest wonder, that our lips have received.*

—Ephrem the Syrian¹

*Do you wish to honor the Body of Christ? Then do not disdain him
when you see him in rags. After having honored him in Church with
silken vestments, do not leave him to die of cold outside for lack of
clothing. For it is the same Jesus who says, ‘This is My Body’ and
who says ‘I was hungry but you would not feed me...’*

—John Chrysostom²

*By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has
given us of his Spirit.*

—1 John 4: 13

In this final chapter, I apply the theo-thaumatic anthropological vision to the liturgy and liberation. In doing so, I argue that liturgy and liberation are “praxes of generosity,” which make one increasingly available to wonder. That is to say, they are practices that acclimate us to the generosity that grounds creation and that habituate to live lives of generosity. Implied in this assertion is the connection, made in previous chapters, between wonder and generosity. In short, generosity grounds all existence. Consequently, all creation is in essence “excess,” since generosity is excessive. This excess is the conditions for the experience of wonder, which is the desire to know and to be known.

¹ Ephrem the Syrian, “Hymn of Faith, No. 10,” in *The Harp of the Spirit: Poems of Saint Ephrem the Syrian*, trans. Sebastian Brock, Publications of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, Vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Aquila Books for the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies, 2013), 144–45.

² In Timothy Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge: Living Baptism and Confirmation* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 103. Older English translation in John Chrysostom, “Homily 50 (Matthew xiv, 23, 24),” in *The Homilies of S. John Chrysostom...on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, trans. George Prevost. A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1843), 685.

This chapter argues that wonder is part of liturgy and liberation only to the extent that they are praxes of generosity. Wonder eludes the human grasp; it is beyond human control. Liturgy and liberation are not an automatic access to wonder. Yet, by habituating one's life to generosity through the practices of liturgy, and liberation, one becomes more available and attuned to the experience of wonder.

Moreover, generosity—that is, to live out of one's true grounding—is both a gift and a demand set before humanity, which humanity can, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, grasp as a way of life. Humanity should not aim at wonder, for wonder is a moving target that cannot be pinned down. Instead, we should aim at generosity. For it is through living generously that one can become supremely open to the joy of wonder and awe.

Liturgy and liberation are praxes that “go with the grain” of being, since existence is grounded in generosity. Both are both praxes of generosity. People are most fully themselves when they live into this generosity which grounds their *being*. Liturgy and liberation are “rooting” exercises: They “re-ground” humans in Generous Itself, whereas the sin of selfishness, egocentrism, indifference, and injustice “uproot” them from that excessive grounding of life. It is only because liturgy and liberation are praxes of generosity that they are, and can be, axes of wonder. This matrix of generosity, wonder, and desire bears the weight of this chapter.

The argument of this chapter goes as follows: First, using a liberationist approach, I define “praxis” first by distinguishing it from activity in generally. Then I name its “anatomy,” the aspects that define and compose praxis as such. I draw mainly from the Marxist philosopher Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and liberation theologian Enrique Dussel. Sánchez' anatomy of praxis includes four features: an end or telos that determines; knowledge that informs; the production of transformative objects *independent* of the subjects that produced them; and the “materialistic”

nature of praxis as such. Third, using the liberationist definition, I explore the possibility of a *Christian* or *theological* praxis, which includes deconstructing assumptions from secular Marxism that posit that the religious cannot be count as “praxis.” Here, I rework Sánchez’ praxis to fit within the doctrine of creation as wholly dependent on God. Fourth, working from Sánchez’ insight that praxis “expresses a certain attitude of the subject toward reality,”³ I propose that love is the “certain attitude” of Christian praxis toward the world. Fifth, I explore the ways that liturgy and liberation are “rooting” exercises that “re-ground” humanity in Generous Itself, confronting the sin of selfishness, indifference, and injustice that “uproot” them from that excessive grounding of life. I argue that liturgy and liberation are sacramental axes of wonder in inasmuch as they are are praxes of generosity. Lastly, I end with a pneumatological reflection on joy, in the Spirit of adoration and prophecy is also the Spirit of joy—an emotion and posture that primordially accompanies the experience of wonder. *Liturgy opens one to God in Christ so that one may be opened by the world in its struggle for justice. This opening of the Spirit—to God in Christ and to the world in Christ’s Name—is pure joy.*

Recap

Chapter one used the phenomenological notion of *epoché* to provide a philosophical account of wonder. In that chapter, I concluded that wonder signifies or points to an “excess within” things themselves and indeed within the horizon of experience itself. Wonder is then the encounter between an epistemically open being with the excess of the other eliciting the sense of wonder.

Chapter two went beyond the phenomenological by exploring the metaphysics of wonder. The aim of that chapter was to get at what “stands behind” (*sub-stantia*) wonder. The

³ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, Biblioteca del pensamiento socialista (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 2003), 266.

phenomenological reduction of chapter one suggested an “ontological tension” between identity and otherness, between the subject being “grasped” by wonder and the object, event, or field doing the “grasping.” The “tension” is, I argue, beyond the reach of the *epoché*.

The metaphysical doctrine of participation makes sense of and grounds the “ontological tension” of identity and difference present in the event of wonder. Using a comparative approach, I delineated and summarized the respective doctrines of participation of Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas, in the end choosing participation in *being and knowing* (Aquinas’ *esse* and Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wujūd*). In these doctrines of participation, the clear distinction between essence and existence explains what “stands under” (*sub-stantia*) the ontological tension between identity and difference that is present in the event of wonder.

There were major differences between the three metaphysical visions, especially between the existential participation of Ibn ‘Arabī and Aquinas, and Ibn Gabirol’s “elemental” participation in *yesōd* (“grounding element”). Yet, the close, comparative reading unearthed a significant, shared metaphysical value, namely, that all three affirm that *generosity* ultimately grounds existence. Generosity is a constitutive or derivative element of *yesōd* (Ibn Gabirol), *wujūd* (Ibn ‘Arabī), and *esse* (Aquinas).

In the excursus, I briefly described theological Generosity as being *essentially* excessive. Generosity is about giving freely without needing to *and* giving more than needed. Moreover, generosity is dynamic; that is, an ongoing giving-and-receiving movement is essential to generosity. I proposed that the giving-and-receiving movement embedded in creation analogously images the Trinitarian relations of giving and receiving. I entered into this analogous image *pneumatologically*, since there is a correspondence between economic activity and the immanent relation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is generosity and mutuality, both in the

immanent Life of the Triune God and in Her economic Life in the world. Since there is a “correspondence” between the immanent and economic Spirit, then to profess faith in the Holy Spirit as “the Lord and Giver of life” is duly to affirm creation as marked by or imbued with this mutuality and sharing-ness of the Spirit. To participate in being is to participate in generosity as givingness. I concluded by positing that the thaumatic (θαυμά; *thauma*) experience is a *charismatic* (χάρισμα; *charisma*) experience, since the Holy Spirit, as “Gift” and “Givingness,” is the *locus* of excessive givingness, desire, identity, and difference—all the features, by the way, of wonder.

Therefore, to live means to participate in this dynamic of givingness; to live *fully* is to respond to this givingness by living generously in the world. By this I mean that the “duality of gift” is both “its gratuity and its demand.”⁴ The duality of gratuity and demand are embodied in the gift of community, which is also a gift of the Holy Spirit who as “wholly relational” is “the divine source of all relations, communions, and solidarities.”⁵ Communal giving is “grace;” it is charismatic existence. And it is from this *charismatic* place of the Spirit that excessive Being most wonderfully appears to us.

A theology of wonder is most fully articulated from this charismatic view. Wonder is the experience of the Holy Spirit (what in metaphysics might be called “pure being”) since the dynamic giving-and-receiving and the experience of excess are the marks of wonder. Wonder as desire is “placed” within the world as a whole and in the world amongst beings in relation, since it is the Spirit, divine Desire, that permeates and moves within creation. The dynamic of receiving is supremely present to humans as subjectively-active and self-aware beings. Humanity

⁴ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 148.

⁵ Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 110.

can come to “hear” the groaning creation and the crying rocks. It can “witness” God’s glory and handiwork. Theologically speaking, wonder *is* this “hearing” and “witnessing.”

After this pneumatological excursus on generosity, I painted a theological portrait of the human based on wonder (excess-within) and the metaphysics of generosity (transcendental Excess). I asserted that the capacity for wonder is a responsive reaching out that is at the core of human being (in response to being grasped by the O/other), a reaching out that is potentially infinite. Wonder is a constitutive aspect of humanity; it is not superfluous but essential to what it means to be human. Wonder is therefore indispensable for theological anthropology.

What “theo-thaumatic” anthropology, then, emerges when we see the human through the lens of wonder? Wonder portrays the human not simply as “open to the world,” but also as “opened *by* the world.” This opened-by then informs how one see understand faith. Faith is to be grasped by God, which parallels wonder as being grasped by the O/other. Since the experience of God is always a mediated experience, then wonder and faith are related. Humanity is opened by God through the other. Desire is the impetus of both faith and wonder. As created beings, faith is a part of wonder. Yet, as recreated beings (the dogmatic term for this is “sanctification”), faith grows and beings to guide wonder. As sanctified being-in-the-world, wonder becomes a part of faith. Like the excursus on generosity, the essay on a theo-thaumatic anthropology concludes with the Holy Spirit, whom trinitarian dogmatics portrays in terms of Desire. To be gifted by the Spirit is to be transformed so that human desire, expressed in faith and experienced in wonder, can be oriented toward God as its end.

Here, in the present chapter, I discuss liturgy and liberation theo-thaumatically by starting with generosity and ending with wonder. Liturgy and liberation are “praxes of generosity,” and orient humanity toward the life of generosity and only “residually” make humanity more attuned

to wonder. That is to say, these praxes acclimate one to the Generosity that grounds creation and habituates one to live out of this generous essence of existence, out of this givingness.

Not All Activity Is Praxis

If the contention is that liturgy and liberation are “praxes of generosity,” then a first step is to define the term *praxis*. The term has been deployed *philosophically* since Plato,⁶ and has more recently played a crucial role in liberation theologies and philosophies.⁷ Since frequent usage of a term typically engenders a range of definitions, one must articulate the term more specifically before making further claims. Since this chapter moves ultimately toward the Gospel call to justice, and since liberation theology is the school in which praxis is essential to its method, I look mainly to liberationist sources for a working definition.

⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., trans. Terence Irwin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999), VI.4.

⁷ Cf. Richard J. Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971); Enrique D. Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); Juan José Gómez Gutiérrez, “Filosofía de la praxis como crítica de la hegemonía en Antonio Gramsci,” *Ideas y Valores* 67, no. 166 (2018): 93–114; Iver A. Beltrán García, “Dialéctica de la creación y la innovación en la *Filosofía de la praxis* de Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez,” *Revista de filosofía* 42, no. 2 (2017): 229; Terry Hoy, *Praxis, Truth, and Liberation: Essays on Gadamer, Taylor, Polanyi, Habermas, Gutierrez, and Ricoeur* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988); Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Praxis de liberación y fe cristiana*, ed. rev. (San Antonio, TX: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1976); idem., “Toward a New Method: Theology and Liberation,” in *Essential Writings*, ed. James B. Nickolof (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 23–77; Ignacio Ellacuría, “Laying the Philosophical Foundations of Latin American Theological Method,” in *Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation*, ed. Michael Edward Lee (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 63–91; Pedro Pablo Serna, “Ubicación de la praxis en las categorías conceptuales de Ellacuría,” *Eidos* 11, no. 11 (2009): 170–187.

Despite the legitimate criticism given to it,⁸ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez' full-length treatment on the subject⁹ is a good place to start.¹⁰ He begins with this basic distinction: "All praxis is activity, but not all activity is praxis."¹¹ Praxis is a specific kind of activity. Sánchez explores "activity," which includes praxis, in a general way, so as to include physical and "psychic" [i.e. mental, intellectual] activity. Here I briefly mention three components of activity, as Sánchez defines it. First, in addition to real action, which is presupposed in *activity*, he posits that all activity looks to a future and therefore has some *telos* or end, even if it is commonplace or temporary. The end functions as a "guiding law" of the activity.¹² Second, specifically *human* activity "has a conscious character."¹³ The "psychic" is embedded, is integral to, the "physical." Knowing is present in acting. (He subsequently uses this to argue for the "unity of theory and practical" in praxis and most intimately, in *revolutionary* praxis.)¹⁴ Lastly, all activity has socio-political impact, which he distinguishes from "intention." Since humans live in an inherited and inescapable "economic-political process," all activity is both intended and *unintended*

⁸ Cf. Edward M. Swiderski, "Book Review: The Philosophy of Praxis," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 23, no. 1 (1982): 80–82; Joseph Flay, "Book Review: The Philosophy of Praxis," *Human Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980): 190–195; Ramón Xirau, "Book Review: Filosofía De La Praxis," *Diálogos: Artes, Letras, Ciencias Humanas* 3, no. 5 (1967): 36–37; J. da Costa Pinto, "Book Review: Filosofía Da Praxis," *Revista Portuguesa De Filosofia* 29, no. 3 (1973): 336. Flay and Swiderski is most critical of Sánchez. They both see a disconnect between the first part (intellectual history of praxis from German idealism to Marx) and the second part (Sánchez' original explorations in the "philosophical problems" of praxis). Both finds ambiguities and contradictions in Sánchez' argumentation. Swiderski particularly notes that the author in dealing with praxis as distinct from theory never defines the latter. In addition to these criticisms, Flay adds others, most notably that the larger goal of the book, "to raise our consciousness of praxis as central to Marxism," in the end "does not live up to its own demands." He also sees Sánchez as trapped by his commitment to the "productive" core of praxis and thus to its "products." Xirau also seems to question the centrality of praxis in Marxism, as well as other presuppositions in Sánchez's treatment. Even the less critical da Costa seems to suggest that the text is simply a good start to think more deeply.

⁹ Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*. [All translations from the Spanish are mine.]

¹⁰ Despite all the valid points for its detractors, I deploy one of the chapters of Sánchez's treatise deemed to have good, original insight and depth, even if there are some questions and contentions raised.

¹¹ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 263.

¹² Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 264–65.

¹³ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 265.

¹⁴ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 286–317.

outcomes. “Historical progress,” for Sánchez, is characterized, in part, by “the overcoming of this unintentionality.”¹⁵

The intended, informed ends (informed by knowing), both of activity as a category and of praxis as a type, express in some way “a certain attitude of the subject toward reality.”¹⁶ Hence, as Marx names, the “worker” [i.e. acting subject] not only changes the “natural,” but in the natural, the subject realizes his or her “objective” [Sánchez prefers the term “end”], an objective that “determines like a law.” The objective-as-law determines not only the final “product,” but also the mode and manner of activity. Hence the subject, in acting, “submits” his or her will to this objective-as-law.¹⁷

The objective-as-law deeply connects the acting subject to the world upon which he or she acts. Human activity is not simply mechanically activity; it is *conscious* activity. The relation between subject and his environment is not merely “exterior,” as in a material body acting upon a “raw material” of nature. His or her “interiority” relates to nature as well, by way of the *intended* end, the will to submit to that end, and the knowledge that informs the end.¹⁸ The conscious subject acts on the outside world, and the outside world—both real and imagined, actual and hoped for—enters the conscious interior.¹⁹ Sánchez concludes, “Thus, the activity of consciousness, which is inseparable from all truly human activity, is the intimate unity of ends and knowledge... [T]he relationship between thought and action requires the mediation of ends that man proposes.” Therefore, since all human activity is conscious activity, it has “theoretical character.”²⁰

¹⁵ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 265.

¹⁶ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 266.

¹⁷ In Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 267.

¹⁸ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 267.

¹⁹ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 267–68.

²⁰ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 269.

What Is Praxis?

What then is praxis? And what distinguishes it from all other types of human activity? First of all, the similarities must be named. All praxis is activity. Accordingly, the “anatomy” of activity applies also to praxis: Praxis is also a nexus of action (“interior” and “exterior”), knowledge, and an end, with the last serving as its “guiding law.”

For Sánchez, the difference between all activity and praxis in particular is in the “product” that each produce. In non-praxic activity, the end product remains dependent on the subject(s) who produce it. The product is subjective activity that remains subjective. It has no life independent of the producer(s) who are acting (e.g. the act of sleeping, breathing). Conversely, the “object” that praxis brings forth depends on the acting subject for its being produced (as in all activity). Yet, once produced, the praxic object is an “independent” product with an objective and material reality of its own, which in turn, adds Sánchez, affirms itself before the producing subject(s). Praxis is “transforming activity” precisely for this reason: it creates difference to the real world by adding to its new objective, real, material outcomes.²¹ In short, praxis is essentially transformative production. To be sure, Sánchez speaks of the “production” of praxis in a broad sense, beyond literal objects. Praxis transforms nature, society, and real human persons.

The end of praxis, generally speaking, is the real, objective transformation of the natural or social world in order to satisfy specific human needs. Indeed, following Marx Sánchez Vázquez highlights the fact that in transforming the “exterior world,” praxis also transforms the subject engaged in praxis.²² Within this expansive view of praxis and its production, he moreover

²¹ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 270–71.

²² Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 271.

speaks of various “forms” of praxis: productive, artistic, experimental, and political.²³ Since all praxis in some way *produces*, productive praxis is the most fundamental because it produces not only “a human or humanized world,” but also the “human.”²⁴ The creative “products” of artistic praxis most noticeably “raise the capacity for human expression and objectification to a higher degree.”²⁵ Experimental praxis is essential scientific; hence, its “immediate end” of the experimental *is* theory.²⁶ Lastly, political praxis is the type of praxis in which the human is both subject and object, that is to say, “the praxis that acts on itself.” Even though productive praxis is the most fundamental, political praxis is the most encompassing of the human person. This is because political praxis deals with human relations, and humans are essentially relational²⁷—“political animals,” as Aristotle posited.²⁸ There is a tension, a “struggle” in political praxis, adds Sánchez, both because of its acting upon itself and because of the magnitude of its unintended impact. Due to this inherent tension, the highest form of political praxis is “revolutionary praxis.”²⁹

In defining human activity as conscious, Sánchez emphasizes that the interiority of the human acts out in the world and that the world is brought into the human. Sánchez does not seem to give a correlate for praxis, but perhaps Enrique Dussel’s insights into praxis can fill in this definitional gap. Dussel speaks of praxis as “proximity.” In articulating the foundations of his philosophy of liberation, he notes that said mode of philosophizing privileges spatiality, i.e. notions of “proximity” and “farness,” “center” and “periphery.” He proposes a metaphysics of

²³ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 271–79.

²⁴ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 274–75.

²⁵ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 275.

²⁶ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 276.

²⁷ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 277.

²⁸ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, 264 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), III.4.

²⁹ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 278.

proximity. After all, the human first “appear[s]... when our mother gives us birth”—the most proximal of human experience. One is born *from, into, and for* proximity. Therefore, the end of liberative praxis is to overcome separation and alienation. He writes, “To shorten the distance *is praxis*.” He explains, “It is acting toward the other as other; it is an action that is directed toward proximity. Praxis is this and nothing more: an approach to proximity.” As praxis, justice is a “risk,” for it “shorten[s] the distance toward a distinct freedom.”³⁰ I suggest that Dussel’s proximity in praxis is a correlate for Sánchez’ interiority of conscious activity.

The Material-Sacramental Praxis of the Christian Life

Working from the Sanchezian anatomy of praxis, in what ways can one speak of *Christian* or *theological* praxis? By “anatomy,” I mean that all praxis, in addition to action, includes four aspects: an end or telos that determines, knowledge, the production of transformative objects *independent* of the subject that produced them, and the “materialistic” and “objective” nature of praxis. Initially, it seems that the first two aspects can be directly applied to the Christian life in the world; yet the last two features of praxis seem to contradict faith in a transcendent, immaterial God. I propose that for one to speak of Christian *praxis*, these contradictions must be resolved through the doctrine of creation, that is, by exploring God’s activity as grounding all activity, including praxis. Therefore, I begin by exploring the first two (end and knowledge) as each applies to Christian life in the world; then I resolve the seeming contradictory aspects (production of independent objects and the materialist-materialist-objectivists limits) by rereading these praxic criteria through the doctrine of creation.

First, Christian life and witness looks to a future and therefore is guided by an “end” or *telos*. In theological terms, the Christian praxis is teleological because it is *eschatological*. To

³⁰ Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, 16–17.

follow Christ is to follow the One who ushers in the “reign of God.”³¹ The reign of God, like generosity, is both a gratuity and a demand: It is a gift that is “already here” *and* a “not yet” calling one to work toward that reign, by the grace of God. The Holy Spirit is given to the Church as a “guarantee”³² of what is promised in the end.

The eschatological hope of Christian praxis is envisioned as unfettered excess without the threat of loss.³³ In the current reality, the threat of existential loss and theft is present. This is the doctrine of sin. Amidst the gift of generous existence, therein lies an ever-present proclivity to claim existence, one’s own and that of others, as a “right” or as “earned,” instead of affirming life as a truly radical, excessive gift from the Giver of life. From this charismatic-thaumatic perspective, one can define sin as *taking-by-force*. Taking-by-force is an affront to the God of creation and redemption.

As a working definition, sin as taking-by-force can be applied to personal and structural sin. As a personal level, taking-by-force is rooted in the believe that one “makes one’s life,”³⁴ instead of one receiving life for the Giver of life. Taking-by-force, at the level of the person, is defined as “making-myself.” At the structural level, taking-by-force is the root of all oppression and injustice, for it takes the excessive gift of life beyond needed. It takes and takes, until the neighbor goes hungry, and one’s hoarded excess is “spoiled.”³⁵ The eschatological hope, in

³¹ Cf. Mark 1:15–14; Luke 4:16–19; Revelation 5.

³² 2 Corinthians 5:5.

³³ Cf. Revelation 21:1–4.

³⁴ Cf. Psalm 100:3.

³⁵ There are two biblical accounts that speak to the “hoarding” of divine generosity. The first in the story of the wandering Hebrews and the manna that fell from the sky. (Cf. Exodus 16) God told the people to only take the manna they needed and nothing more. Yet, people began to take more than needed for the day. The texts states that their hoarded excess of manna “became foul.” (verse 20) The other is Jesus’ parable of the “rich fool” whose farm yielded crops in abundance. (Luke 12:13–21) Instead of sharing, the man decides to tear down his barns to build bigger ones. The parable ends with God letting the man know that “this very night your life is being demanded of you.” (verse 20) Jesus is clear about the

short, is the overthrowing of taking-by-force and the establishing of an economy of dynamic giving-and-receiving wherein takin-by-force is unnecessary.

Second, Christian praxis is grounded in and informed by the kerygma: Jesus is “the Christ [χριστὸς; “anointed one,” messiah], Son of the Living God.”³⁶ The content of all Christian praxis is informed by the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ.³⁷ The knowledge that informed the ends of faith is the Incarnation of the Word of God.³⁸ There is a Christocentric core to Christian knowing. The *Logos* is that by which the world was made and ordered.³⁹ Christian knowing is thus ordered and oriented by that creative *Logos*. The earlier dogmatic material of the Church is found in these Christological declaration of Jesus of Nazareth as “Christ,” “Lord,” “Savior,” “crucified,” and “risen.” There is a “knowledge” to Christian living in the world, and this knowledge orders and makes intelligible the world as created, loved, and being reconciled to God through Christ.⁴⁰

I add that confessional knowledge grounds praxis more deeply than other forms of “knowledge” in one important way. Sánchez rightly posits that praxis is in some way self-involving, especially in its productive and political forms. Productive praxis, the most fundamental, produces not only “a human or humanized world,” but also the “human.”⁴¹ Political praxis, the most encompassing, acts on itself.⁴² Likewise, confessions of faith are actively self-involving.⁴³ As Stephen T. Davis asserts, it is not simply a “mental state”; it must be “acted

lesson of this parable: “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” (verse 15)

³⁶ Matthew 16:16; cf. Mark 8:29; John 11:27.

³⁷ Cf. 1 Corinthians 2:1–2, 15: 3–8, 15:12–28.

³⁸ Cf. John 1:1–4, 14; Philippians 2:6–8.

³⁹ John 1:3–4; Cf. 1 John 1:1–4; Proverbs 8:22–31; Wisdom of Solomon 7:22–8:1.

⁴⁰ John 1:2, 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19.

⁴¹ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 274–75.

⁴² Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 277.

⁴³ Dalferth, *Crucified and Resurrected*, 12 ff.

upon.”⁴⁴ I suggest that confessions, as the knowledge of Christian praxis, are inherently praxic. Confession and praxis are mutually constitutive terms. Faith, like generosity, is both gratuitous and demanding.

One must re-read the third and fourth aspects of Sanchez’ taxonomy of praxis theologically before applying them to a thoroughly Christian praxis. These two aspects are: the production of transformative objects *independent* of the subject that produced them, and the “materialistic” and “objective” nature of praxis. I discuss each in turn.

The doctrine of creation affirms that the total gift of being is in each moment dependent on God as Generosity Itself. “To say that giving is born of excess is to acknowledge God as the one who creates our giving.”⁴⁵ Every act in being is grounded, in its totality, in the Act-of-Being Itself. God is not an agent acting among other agents; instead, She is that Act which makes all created activity possible, the Being-Itself that sustains all created being.⁴⁶

Therefore, if the doctrine of creation is affirmed, then all acts of being and acting are *dependent* and *derivative*. All Christian living, all Christian praxis, is in each moment dependent on the Holy Spirit and derives from the “praxis” of the Holy Spirit. Paul declares that one cannot confess “Jesus is Lord” “except by the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷ The Church’s “praxis” as the “body of Christ” to work for the “common good” is simply the “manifestation of the Spirit.”⁴⁸ Moral formation is not the “fruit” of one’s efforts, but of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Stephen T. Davis, “The Theological Virtues: ‘And the Greatest of These Is Love’,” in *Faith, Hope, Love, and Justice: The Theological Virtues Today*, ed. Anselm K. Min (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 60–61.

⁴⁵ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 140.

⁴⁶ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 36 ff.; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.25.2, I.45.5.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:3.

⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:7.

⁴⁹ Galatians 5:22–23.

From this creational hermeneutic then, the third feature of Christian praxis inverts Sánchez' productive praxis. In Christian praxis, the "products" of faith transform humanity and the world *because they remain dependent* on the active Subject. This dependency does not make the "fruit" of Christian praxis any less real, since all created reality is ultimately dependent. Webb concurs: "For Christians, God's giving is initially hyperbolic, or, in other words, it is excessive because it initiates all of our own giving."⁵⁰

This relates to the fourth aspect of praxis, namely the objectivity, materiality, and historicity of praxis as such. In Sánchez' materialist and historical account of praxis as such one quickly notes a possible objection to a theological praxis generally or a praxis of Christian faith. If by definition, praxis is defined by the transformation of *objective, material* products in the course of *history*, then one could reject any religious appropriation of faith, since faith (as popularly understood) deals only with "souls," beliefs, subjective experience, and *ahistorical* ends. According to his definition, Sánchez notes that religious or spiritual activity cannot be counted as praxis.⁵¹

Yet here Sánchez is misreading the Christian faith. As stated above, the core of the Christian kerygma and praxis is *incarnational*. Moreover, Christian faith professes that the *Logos* that took on flesh *in history* is the same creative *Logos* through whom all things were made⁵² and who brings into hypostatic unity the doctrines of salvation and creation. To use Rahnerian categories, the kerygma speaks not only to the "transcendental" but to the "historical";

⁵⁰ Webb, *The Gifting God*, 139.

⁵¹ Cf. Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 269–70, 275–76.

⁵² John 1:3; Colossians 1:16. Cf. Proverbs 8:22–31; Wisdom of Solomon 7:22–8:1. Since the object of God's salvific action is all of creation, Rahner posits that therefore it had to be the *Logos* to incarnate. Yet Min suggests that it is presumptuous to make such an assertion. Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, Milestones in Catholic Theology (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1997), 23; Min, "The Humanity of Theology," 191.

in fact, it speaks of the former as mediated through the latter. As a historical and eschatological faith, the kerygma is not *ahistorical* but *transhistorical*.

The Incarnation, moreover, asserts that matter also falls within God's salvific concern. Hence, Christian praxis is material. Again, the doctrine of creation parallels soteriology, in that it affirms God as creator "of all things visible and invisible" (Nicene Creed), meaning as the *material* cause of existence.⁵³ Here, the recent turn to speak of Christian discipleship or spiritual as habituating the body or developing bodily habits in the service of God⁵⁴ is more faithful to the incarnational core of the Christian kerygma and the praxis it engenders.

Lastly, Christian faith deems materiality as necessary for the encounter with God. All divine encounter is mediated. All of created existence—indeed existence itself—is sacramental in that it can mediate the grace and generosity of God. Leonardo Boff writes, "[E]xperience of God is always a sacramental experience... A sacrament does not tear human beings away from this world. It addresses an appeal to them, asking them to look more closely and deeply into the very heart of the world."⁵⁵ The sacraments of the Church are not generosity-mediating exceptions in an otherwise flat, mechanistic world. Quite the contrary! As Gerard Manley Hopkins exclaims, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."⁵⁶ Philip Clayton highlights that in the philosophical history, "matter continually recedes from our grasp."⁵⁷ I propose that this is not due to materiality's lack, but due to its "excessive" quality. The Christian life is sacramental in that it is "material." The praxis of faith is mediated through things in this world,

⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.65.1.

⁵⁴ Cf. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies, Vol. 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 75 ff.; Stanley Hauerwas, "Habits Matter: The Bodily Character of the Virtues," in *Ecclesia and Ethics: Moral Formation and the Church*, ed. E. Allen Jones (New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016), 71–86.

⁵⁵ Boff, *Sacraments of Life*, 31, 32.

⁵⁶ Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," 27.

⁵⁷ Philip Clayton, "Unsolved Dilemmas," 50.

for it affirms that divine grace is operative in and through material things and acts,. As L. Boff, the entire world is sacramental.

Love as the “Attitude” Toward and “Proximity” to the World

After he dissects the anatomy of “praxis,” Sanchez speaks of the overall quality or sense of praxis in this way: praxis “expresses a certain attitude of the subject toward reality.”⁵⁸ I add to this Dussel’s summation of praxis as proximity, for praxis as a certain attitude toward and nearness to reality can elucidate Christian praxis as well. In this section, I describe Christian praxis in these terms.

Above, I mentioned that Christian praxis includes *hope* in the telos that guides praxis and *faith* in the kerygma that informs praxis. I posit here that *love* is the “certain attitude toward reality” that ultimately marks Christian praxis. Christian praxis is the activity of faith, hope, and love, with the “the greatest of these” being love.⁵⁹

Love is the Christian “attitude” toward the world, and that love is expressed in Christian “proximity” to the world. Like wonder, love is a being “open *by* the world.” Love is necessary to the encounter with God in this regard. It is by placing oneself in a loving attitude and in proximate availability to the “excess-with” that one encounters wonder, the “transcendental Excess” of God’s generosity. Hans Urs Von Balthasar writes,

In order that he shall find God, the Christian is placed in the streets of the world, sent to his manacled and poor brethren, to all who suffer, hunger and thirst; to all who are naked, sick, and in prison. From henceforth this is his place; he must identify with them all... for it is the same way that God sent a Savior to us.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 266.

⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:13.

⁶⁰ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Sermons through the Liturgical Year*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), 277–78.

The availability to be opened by the other—namely, wonder-as-faith—is what marks Christian presence in the world. *The Holy Spirit sanctifies our basic opened-by-ness and redirects it to be opened-by the gift and demand of divine generosity.*

Christian praxis is a “place” that expresses love in the world. It is a place that “de-centers” the one who sits there. As Gabriel Marcel declares, “Love is life which decentralizes itself, which changes its center.”⁶¹ In that place, love and faith are tied in “an original unity.”

⁶²In Christian praxis, faith and love are bound together. Von Balthasar adds, “Just as true love of God is shown in love of neighbor and cannot be divorced from it, so too a willingness in faith to accept God’s truth cannot be separated from an openness to the word and truth of one’s neighbor.”⁶³ Von Balthasar seems to have the Johannine epistle in mind: “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.”⁶⁴ The certain attitude of Christian praxis is love.

Liturgy and Liberation as the Praxis of the Holy Spirit

As stated above, the doctrine of creation determines all (Christian) praxis as derivative and dependent. This then applies to the anatomy, attitude, and place of praxis. Christian ends are God’s ends and intentions for the world. The knowledge of Christian praxis, the kerygma, is God Herself, that is, God incarnate in Christ. Christian praxis is action in history based on the faith and hope of a God who acted, acts, and will act in history.

⁶¹ In McCown, *Availability*, 45.

⁶² Rahner, *Hearer of the Word*, 28.

⁶³ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), 16.

⁶⁴ 1 John 4:20.

Christian love, as attitude and proximity, also derives from God's "attitude" toward and proximity to the world in love. The Church's drawing near to God is preceded by "God drawing near" to humanity and the world, in creation, Israel, and supremely in Jesus Christ.⁶⁵ "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit."⁶⁶ The Church's drawing near to the world, to be opened by it, derives from God drawing the Church out into the world She loves, where the Son is found among the ignored and oppressed of the world. "We love because he first loved us."⁶⁷

The Church draw nears to God in liturgy, the "theater" of the Holy Spirit,⁶⁸ who fills the Church with Her presence through prayer, word, and the sacraments. In the liturgical drawing near to God, the Church does not actually move closer to God—as transcendent, God is "closer than one's jugular vein."⁶⁹ Rather, the Church becomes aware of God's closeness in and through the Spirit. Liturgy reminds the Church that Jesus is not simply the "paradigm," but the "means." We draw near by means of the Spirit of Christ. In drawing near by the power of the Spirit, the gathered are transformed, altered, changed.⁷⁰

The refrain of the liturgical cry is "Make us worthy to approach Your Gift in awe!"⁷¹ In response, Christ set the Table at which we are filled with the Spirit—with God's Desire, with

⁶⁵ Joel B. Green defines salvation as "God drawing near." See his *Salvation*, Understanding Biblical Themes (St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2003), 96 ff.

⁶⁶ 1 John 4:13.

⁶⁷ 1 John 4:19.

⁶⁸ This concept of liturgy as "charismatic theater" is developed by Daniel E. Albrecht, in his *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/charismatic Spirituality*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, 17 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 196 ff.

⁶⁹ Qur'ān, *Al-Basīqat* 50.16.

⁷⁰ Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key*, Current Issues in Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14.

⁷¹ Ephrem the Syrian, "Hymn of Faith, No. 10," 144–45.

God's Generosity/Givingness, with God's drawing-near. As the great hymn of Ephrem the Syrian declares:

In Your Bread there is hidden the Spirit who is not consumed,
in your Wine there dwells the Fire that is not drunk:
the Spirit is in Your Bread, the Fire in Your Wine—
a manifest wonder, that our lips have received.⁷²

Liturgy generates wonder only to the extent that it draws the gathered into closer communion with Generosity itself. *Make us worthy to approach Your Gift in awe!*

As stated above, Christian praxis affirms its transformation as being mediated by sacramental and sacramentalizing materiality. This does not make Christian praxis the exception to the rule since all of created existence is sacramental in that it can mediate the grace and generosity of God. L. Boff writes, “[E]xperience of God is always a sacramental experience.”⁷³ Christian praxis of faith is mediated through material (i.e. praxical) acts, for it affirms that by power of the Holy Spirit, they mediate divine grace.

Yes, the entire world is sacramental; yet, within this sacramental quality of the saturated horizon, there are “various degrees of sacramental concentration and density.”⁷⁴ The sacraments of the Water, Bread and Wine are generosity-mediating intensifications, which effect salvific grace, in a generosity-mediating world. They are “sacramental axes,”⁷⁵ which are special means of grace within a grace-filled world.

The intensifying agent of Water, Bread and Wine is Christ, that is, the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whereas the sacraments of the *world* are grounding these *creational* acts of God, the sacraments of the *Word* are grounded in the

⁷² Ephrem the Syrian, “Hymn of Faith, No. 10,” 144.

⁷³ Boff, *Sacraments of Life*, 31, 32.

⁷⁴ Boff, *Sacraments of Life*, 55.

⁷⁵ Boff, *Sacraments of Life*, 55 ff.

soteriological acts of God. The Font and Table are “sacramental axes” in that they reveal and effect the saving grace of God in Christ for the world. They join us to the mystical body of Christ.⁷⁶ The crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ is the “density” of these two intensified sacraments in the world. They are sacramental axis in that they mediate Christ *as savior*.

Hence, in this sense, liberation must also be considered a dense, intensified sacramental axis. For the praxis of justice (i.e. socio-economic generosity) mediates Christ *as liberator* (i.e. socio-economic salvation). Liberation brings together the sacraments of the *world* and the sacraments of the *Word*. Indeed, the work of justice is *the sacrament of the Word in the world*. The crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ is the “density” of the sacrament of liberation, for we meet Christ in the oppressed, the marginalized, the excluded, and the forgotten. Chrysostom intimates the sacramentality of justice when he declares, “For it is the same Jesus who says, ‘This is My Body’ and who says ‘I was hungry but you would not feed me.’”⁷⁷ Like the Font and Table, the struggle for liberation also join us to the mystical body of Christ.⁷⁸

The liturgy of the Holy Spirit is paradoxically bi-directional: its gathers and it sends out. Liturgy is both centripetal and centrifugal. The Spirit sends out for justice. Liberation therefore is the other praxis of the Holy Spirit “in us.” The Spirit links being open to God and being open to the world. The sapiential Spirit is the liberative Spirit. A complete pneumatology includes both aspects as inseparable unity.⁷⁹ The priestly oil and the prophetic fire are ultimately one and the same.

⁷⁶ Cf. Galatians 2:20–21; 3:27; Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; John 6:35–59.

⁷⁷ In Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge*, 103.

⁷⁸ Cf. Matthew 25:34–40; Galatians 6:2; 1 John 4:7–21.

⁷⁹ Anselm K. Min, *Paths to the Triune God*, 10–11. Min writes, “Without the theocentric, universal vision of sapiential theology, prophetic theology ceases to be theology and becomes humanitarian sociology. Without the burning concern for the liberation of the oppressed and suffering of prophetic theology, sapiential theology ceases to be Christian and becomes aesthetic contemplation. Only in this creative tension can each remain both theology and Christian.”

In the praxis of liberation, the Church draws near to the world to be opened by it, to be opened by the cries of the oppressed⁸⁰ and the groaning of creation.⁸¹ In being opened by the world, the Church finds God “there” as well. *Liturgy opens one to God so that one may be opened by the world in its struggle for justice.*

The Church partakes of the Bread, of the broken Body of Christ, to then partake in the suffering of the broken bodies in the world. The inverse relationship applies as well, since as John Zizioulas emphasizes, “All the faithful who go to the liturgy bring the world with them.”⁸² It is in the love of neighbor wherein one encounters the God of love. Liberative praxis, inversely, makes one malleable to the Spirit hovering over the waters of baptism⁸³ and over the bread. “For it is the same Jesus who says, ‘This is My Body’ and who says ‘I was hungry but you would not feed me.’”⁸⁴

Lastly, liturgy and liberation are “countercultural”⁸⁵ praxes. I began this study by naming the deforming and “flattening” of human life in our contemporary, neoliberal capitalist age. Human value is demarcated by utility and productivity. This has been to praxes of scarcity and theft as operative in the world, instead of a praxis of generosity true to the nature of existence. As a result, the idolatries of making-myself (anti-creation) and taking-by-force (injustice) are the value with which the “culture” is built. Both reject theological affirmation of creation as participation in Generosity Itself.

⁸⁰ Exodus 2:23–25.

⁸¹ Romans 8:23.

⁸² John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World* (London: T & T Clark, 2011), 125.

⁸³ Cf. Mark 1:10; Genesis 1:2.

⁸⁴ In Radcliffe, *Take the Plunge*, 103.

⁸⁵ For a full exploration of the eucharist as “countercultural,” see Yik-Pui Au, *The Eucharist as a Countercultural Liturgy: An Examination of the Theologies of Henri De Lubac, John Zizioulas, and Miroslav Volf* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2017).

Liturgy and liberation are revolutionary praxes (the highest form of praxis, according to Sánchez).⁸⁶ Liturgy denounces the idolatry of making-myself, for it reorients the faithful back to the Source of all being and reminds them of their wondrous creatureliness. Liberation denounces taking-by-force (injustice), proclaiming instead an ethic of generosity grounded in the “non-competitive”⁸⁷ participation of all creation in Generosity Itself. The psalmist asserts the denouncing of these idolatries as the liturgical proclamation of an excessively generous God:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.
For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.⁸⁸

In worship, the faithful declare that “it is he that made us” (against making-myself) and that “his steadfast love endures forever” (taking-by-force). In this sense, liturgy and liberation reclaim full humanity grounded in the excessive generosity of a creative, redeeming, and sustaining God. Liturgy and liberation, ontologically speaking, tap into the deep basis of existence, which is Generosity Itself. They are *thaumatic* practices so far as they are *charismatic* practices.

The Spirit of Joy and Wonder

Christian praxis is marked by a radical predisposition to the joy of wonder. After all, the Spirit of liberation is also the Spirit of joy.⁸⁹ Spirit-gifted Christian praxis is the praxis of love.

⁸⁶ Sánchez Vázquez, *Filosofía de la praxis*, 278.

⁸⁷ Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*, 2–3.

⁸⁸ Psalm 100.

⁸⁹ Romans 14:17, 15:13; Galatians 5:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

The “attitude” of Christian praxis is liturgical and liberative insofar as it is one of faith, hope, and love. As liturgical and liberative, Christian praxis is not simply a posture of opened-to but principally of opened-*by*. That it is a praxis of “opened-by” makes one radically available to the joy of wonder.

In Chapter 1, I challenged the assumption that wonder is an emotion and instead demonstrated that wonder is *accompanied by* emotions. Experience tells us that the primordial emotion that accompanies wonder is joy. There is a joyous timbre in every rapturous moment of wonder. Although it is overly simplistic, one could say that wonder is the experience of being overjoyed by the other.

Yet, theologically understood, joy is not simply an emotion. Rather, it is the opening-by of hope in the ends of God. It is a posture of eschatological openness toward the world—wonder is a posture of epistemic openness toward the world—the world that God is drawing to Herself. It is the radical trust that generosity is the both the origin and end of creation.

The Apostle Paul ties joy and hope in the power of the Spirit. He declares, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁹⁰ It is in this sense that one can say that “the joy of the Lord is your strength.”⁹¹ By the grace of the Holy Spirit, liturgy opens one to God in Christ so that one may be opened by the world in its struggle for liberation. This opening of the Spirit—to God in Christ and to the world in Christ’s Name—is pure joy.

⁹⁰ Romans 15:13.

⁹¹ Nehemiah 8:10.

CONCLUSION

Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement.get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually. To be spiritual is to be amazed.

—Abraham Joshua Heschel¹

*And for all this, nature is never spent...
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.*

—Gerard Manley Hopkins²

Based on the premise of wonder as basis or foundation of the human being, this study has argued that if theology is to *transform*, it must engage and speak to the human person at that “basic” level of wonder. If all theology is a dialectic between God who reveals and humanity that is endowed with the ability to receive divine revelation, then theology must account both for a God who in freedom reveals Herself to humanity *and* for what it is in the human that makes him or her available to revelation from an ontologically-other God. The premise focuses this treatise on the latter entity in the dialectic, specifically a theological anthropology of wonder (or a theo-thaumatic anthropology).

The inquiry moved, broadly speaking, from phenomenology to comparative metaphysics to theology (both constructive and applied or practical). I began the exploration with a phenomenological account of the experience of wonder so as to describe the kind of “lifeworld” (*Lebenswelt*) in which one is “basically” available to (the) wonder. I bracketed the *experience* of wonder in order to get “to the thing itself,” i.e. to the *eidos* of wonder. This led to some questions that fall beyond the scope of phenomenology. Therefore, I moved to a metaphysical query to explore reality vis-à-vis the experience of wonder, in search for an ontological grounding or

¹ In Diane M. Millis, *Conversation, the Sacred Art: Practicing Presence in an Age of Distraction* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2013), 135.

² Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” 27.

basis for wonder. Both the phenomenological and metaphysical inquiries yielded specifically anthropological insights, which set the terrain for a theological exploration of the human being. After an excursus on generosity, which briefly explored the principal metaphysical discovery of chapter two, the following chapter worked toward a theological anthropology of wonder. I closed with a theo-thaumatic anthropological reading of both liturgy and liberation, arguing that both are “sacramental axes” of wonder.

Awe-some Insight: Chapter Summaries and Discoveries

Chapter one used the phenomenological notion of *epoché* to provide a philosophical account of wonder. Wonder signifies or points to an “excess within” things themselves and indeed within the whole field of experience itself. Life is marked by this excess-within, which on occasions grasps the human in a visceral way. This is wonder: wonder is the other’s grasping the human at that place where the human is epistemically open to the world.

This grasping “from without” disrupts typical accounts that put wonder squarely within human subjectivity, as purely or solely the experience of human *agency*. What emerged instead was the idea that in the event of wonder, the human is not the subject but the object. The human does not act on wonder; wonder acts on the human. It is the other who “acts,” be it a thing, field, another person or persons, or even the whole field of experience itself (what metaphysically is denominated by the term “being”). Object-oriented ontology was fruitful in this regard, since it “endorses the things-in-themselves” as being “irreducible” and “ungraspable” and simply, against Kant, “the sole and tragic burden of human beings.”³

The key notion unearthed in this phenomenological reduction was that the excess-within is not to be found within human subjectivity. This excess-within permeates all things, including

³ Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 261, Kindle Edition.

human being and subjectivity. I did raise a possible objection: If this excessive quality marks the whole of the horizon of existence, would this not just be “the norm” and the excess-within would actually not be excessive at all? Yet I posited that the emotive, rapturous impression of wonder points to an excess-within that is never subsumed or normalized. Wonder is precisely the type of experience that resists normalization and sedation. The horizon of experience is marked by an excess-within that occasionally breaks through. It grasps the human who is already “available” epistemically at the point of that availability and openness.

A final key aspect of wonder was its ontological dialectic of identity and difference between the human person grasped by wonder and the other eliciting wonder. In the moment of wonder are two mutually-constitutive elements: there is a heightened, attuned awareness of the other grasping the human in wonder, and there is a heightened, attuned awareness of oneself as being grasped in wonder. The person is one with the other grasping in wonder, yet one is not lost in or subsumed into the grasp of the other. Quite the contrary! One is supremely attuned and aware of oneself in that wondrous moment without subsuming the other who or that is eliciting one’s sense of wonder. This mutually-constitutive, dialectic experience brings together ontology and epistemology.

The phenomenological method is indeed incisive, peeling deep layers and revealing the essence of wonder as experienced in the lifeworld. Yet that method of inquiry could only take the exploration so far. Thus, in chapter two, I approached wonder metaphysically to get at what “stands behind” wonder, and to situate the experience and possibility of wonder within a broader metaphysical schema. The metaphysical question in this chapter was: What is it about reality that makes possible the experience of wonder?

This move is methodologically significant, and it required me to defend how I moved from “non-metaphysical” phenomenology to the metaphysics of being. The phenomenological reduction of chapter one suggested an “ontological tension” between identity and difference, between the subject being grasped by wonder and the object, event, or field doing the grasping. I proposed that to answer this question meant going beyond phenomenology’s reach. The ontological dialectic pointed to a structure of reality as such. Though it was possible to do a phenomenological ontology, I preferred the “openness” that a metaphysics offers. Also, I acknowledge that I accept phenomenology as a method, but not as an ideology that discourages or rejects the metaphysical enterprise.

In chapter two, I demonstrated how the doctrine of participation makes sense of and grounds the ontological dialectic of identity and difference present in the event of wonder. The first two-thirds of the chapter outlined and analyzed the respective doctrines of participation of Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas, three eminent Golden Age or Medieval metaphysicists of being. Each thinker’s doctrine of participation proposes a higher principle in which created entities participate and from which they derive their being, and a divine attribute that correlates to that higher principle. These are listed below in *Fig. 5.1*:

<i>Figure 5.1</i>		
Thinker	Principle of Participation	Divine Attribute Related to Participation
Ibn Gabirol	<i>yesōd</i> (‘grounding element’; ‘foundation’)	desire
Ibn ‘Arabī	<i>wujūd</i> (“being”; “knowing”; “being known”)	mercy
Aquinas	<i>esse</i> (“being”; “act of being”; “existence”)	goodness

Since the *metaphysical* doctrine of participation correlates to the *theological* affirmation of the doctrine of creation, Ibn Gabirol, Ibn ‘Arabī, and Aquinas posit that it is desire, mercy, and goodness, respectively, that define the whole of existence.

In the end, and with the question of wonder in view, of these I chose participation in *being* (Aquinas’ *esse* and Ibn ‘Arabī’s *wujūd*) for its comprehensiveness, since being is the all-encompassing principle in metaphysics. Affirming participation in being, furthermore, distinguishes between the essence and existence of things. Thus, this distinguishing, I concluded, accounts for what “stands under” the ontological dialectic between identity and difference that is present in the event of wonder.

Ibn Gabirol’s “materialist” participation does provide necessary modifications. Ibn Gabirol’s material agency pairs well with the features of “sensation-*hýle*” and spatiality that play prominent roles in the event of wonder. I recognize that the phenomenological “*hýle*” and essentialist “matter” are identical concepts, since each school depends on different sets of presuppositions. Yet they do overlap in translation. Both denote the locality, spatiality, and thereness of a thing, aspects that are available to the senses or aspects inferred by sensual data.

I read Aquinas *through* Ibn ‘Arabī to highlight the unity of being and knowing, which is implicit in the former but explicit the latter. Ibn ‘Arabī’s participation in *wujūd* more overtly names the unity of being and knowing/perceiving than does Aquinas’ *esse*. *Wujūd* is both an ontological and an epistemological category. (In a sense then, wonder is thoroughly “wujudian.”) For though the unity of being and knowing *is* present in Aquinas, it must be deduced, either metaphysically by way of “the transcendentals,” or dogmatically by way of the *Logos*. *Esse* and *wujūd* are nearly identical principles.

There were obvious differences between Ibn Gabirol's, Ibn 'Arabī's, and Aquinas' respective doctrines of participation, especially between the first and the latter two. Yet in doing a close, comparative reading of the three, one crucial similarity came to light: All three affirm that *generosity* ultimately grounds existence. Generosity is a constitutive or derivative element of *yesod* (Ibn Gabirol), *wujūd* (Ibn 'Arabī), and *esse* (Aquinas). I identified this similarity at the close of chapter 3, whose method was mainly comparative and analytic.

The excursus that followed was the first thoroughly constructive *theological* exercise in the treatise. That excursus constructed a working definition of “generosity,” first as it pertains to God and then as it pertains to creation as *God's creative activity*. I intentionally kept the explorations into a theological concept of generosity at the elementary level best suited to an excursus. I wanted to give generosity a prominent place in the overall discussion without de-centering the principal preoccupation of the project, namely, wonder. I hope the excursus did just that.

So, what is generosity, theologically understood? Generosity is *essentially* excessive. Generosity is giving freely without needing to *and* giving more than needed. Moreover, generosity is dynamic; an ongoing giving-and-receiving movement is essential to generosity. I carefully proposed that the Trinitarian relations give an analogous view of that giving-and-receiving movement. I made this comparison somewhat tentatively because God's being is after all distinct to creaturely being and because the gift of being is infinitely greater than any gift that creatures can give back to God in response.

If to participate in being is to participate in generosity, then God as Being Itself is *Generosity* Itself. The trinitarian God is not some generic “substance” that then is populated or divided by three Persons. (As I stated in that section, some versions of Trinitarian dogmatics

make this mistake.) Rather, the Father eternally giving in the Son all that He is, the Son eternally receiving and giving back to the Father, and finally, the Holy Spirit being the eternal giving and receiving between the Father and the Son, *is God*.

Moreover, within the economic Trinity, the Holy Spirit is understood in the most immanent terms. The Spirit hovers over creation and is placed into *adam*. The prophets proclaim God's word by the anointing of the Spirit. The Incarnation and Resurrection are enacted by the power of the Spirit. The Church becomes the continuing presence of Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit. And, the Spirit "groans" with creation as creation groans for the final redemption of all that is, including itself.⁴ The Holy Spirit is, economically speaking, immanently at work throughout created being.

Thus, Givingness is most immanent, economically speaking. Both to live and to live *fully* means to enter into this dynamic of Givingness. To say that creation exists by gift does not suffice. Rather, creation is God's gift, perennially given. Ibn 'Arabī's occasionalism seeks to grasp this, as does Aquinas' definition of creation as the ontologically-prior emanation of all of being from God.

If the nature of being is therefore givingness and not simply gift, then the gift of being is also a task, the task of sharing, i.e. continual receiving and giving. Humans, as most fully present to being, are the bearers for this task. To humans is given this task of reconciliation, and the message thereof, to the Church for the world.⁵

I concluded by proposing where wonder fits into this givingness of creation. First wonder is the experience of *pure being* since the dynamics of receiving and giving excessively are the marks of wonder. Second, the dynamics of receiving and giving are an integral part of all

⁴ Genesis 1:2; Genesis 2:7; Isaiah 61:1; Luke 1:35; Ephesians 1:20; Romans 8:22–23.

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.

being, not simply human subjectivity. This allows for wonder as desire to be “place” within the world as a whole and in the world “amongst things.” This may be why Scripture speaks of creation “groaning” in hope, of rocks “crying out” the praises of God, of the heavens “telling the glory of God” and “the firmament proclaim[ing] his handiwork.”⁶ Third, though the dynamic of receiving and giving is an integral part of all being, it is supremely present to humans as subjectively-active and self-aware beings. As the self-aware beings among all created being, humanity can “hear” the groaning creation and the crying rocks. They can witness God’s glory and handiwork. Wonder is experienced in human terms as the availability to that wonder-as-desire placed within creation.

With this excursus into generosity, I accounted theologically for the excessive quality of the metaphysics of existence and for excessive attunement at the level of experience. The event of wonder is the experience of the excess-within of the world that occasionally bursts through into life. I place this experience within a metaphysical vision of transcendental Excess. The ordering from metaphysics to phenomenology is important. For if one stays in the phenomenal world, one cannot assert a transcendental Excess. Yet if one begins with a metaphysics of being, then one can include the “cyphers” of experience within that architectonic vision of the whole.

With this concept of givingness as the ultimate grounding of wonder in place, I moved on to construct what I called a theo-thaumatic anthropology. First of all, I assert that the experience of wonder is always responsive. It is a second act after the initial being grasped by the O/other. Second, this responsive reaching out is at the core of human being. Lastly, this reaching out is infinite. Such an understanding of wonder makes wonder indispensable to a theological account

⁶ Romans 8:22–23; Luke 19:40; Psalm 19:1.

of the human in general, and of the human act of faith in God specifically. Thus, wonder is not a luxury, but indispensable and necessary for the fullness of life.

I established the claim through several steps. First, I proposed the indispensable role of theological anthropology for establishing the ground for proper theological discourse—theological anthropology as *theologia fundamentalis*. I gleaned key anthropological insights from both the phenomenological description of wonder and the doctrine of participation. With these gleanings, I read Max Scheler’s notion of being “open to the world,” and through Helmuth and Rahner reread it as being “opened *by* the world.”

Following from that, I offered some theo-thaumatic anthropological sketches by exploring connections between wonder, faith, and desire. Faith is generally expression within wonder. Yet as faith grows and transforms the human, these are inverted, and wonder becomes an expression of faith. Wonder comes about under the guidance of faith and is directed toward God. I concluded with a pneumatological note, highlighting how the Holy Spirit, in trinitarian dogmatics, is spoken of in terms of Desire. To be gifted by the Spirit is to be transformed so that human desire, expressed in faith and experienced in wonder, can be oriented toward God as its end.

In the final chapter, I applied the theo-thaumatic anthropological vision to the Christian praxis. I argue that Christian praxis is the praxis of generosity, with liturgy and liberation as sacramental axis of this generous witness in the world. That is to say, liturgy and liberation are sacramental praxes of generosity, which make one increasingly available to wonder. They are practices that acclimate one to the generosity that grounds creation and that habituate one’s live toward generosity. Running throughout the chapter is the ontological connection between wonder and generosity.

In the previous chapter, I begin with generosity and end with wonder. Here, the argumentative movement is inverted. Wonder is part of liturgy and liberation only to the extent that they are praxes of generosity. Wonder is beyond human control. Yet, by habituating one's life to generosity through the practices of liturgy, and liberation, one becomes more available and attuned to the experience of wonder. Humanity should not aim at wonder, for wonder is a moving target that cannot be pinned down. Instead, it should aim at generosity, as both a gift to receive and a demand to live out. For it is through living generously that one can become supremely open to the joy of wonder and awe.

Liturgy and liberation are praxes that “go with the grain” of being. They are “rooting” exercises: They “re-ground” humanity in Generosity Itself as counter praxes to sin that “uproots” its from that excessive grounding of life. It is only because liturgy and liberation are praxes of generosity that they are, and can be, axes of wonder. This matrix of generosity, wonder, and desire bears the weight of this chapter.

To make the argument, I first of all laid out the definition and fourfold anatomy of praxis: an end or telos that determines; knowledge that informs; the production of transformative objects *independent* of the subjects that produced them; and the “materialistic” nature of praxis. Working from this fourfold definition, I unpacked *Christian* praxis as the praxis of generosity, whose “attitude” toward the world is love. I closed the essay by exploring the ways that liturgy and liberation are “rooting” exercises that “re-ground” humanity in Generous Itself, confronting the sin of selfishness, indifference, and injustice that “uproot” them from that excessive grounding of life. In the end, I contend that I argue that liturgy and liberation are sacramental axes of wonder in inasmuch as they are are praxes of generosity. The essay concluded with this pneumatological declaration: By the power of the Holy Spirit, liturgy opens one to God in Christ

so that one may be opened by the world in its struggle for justice. This opening of the Spirit—to God in Christ and to the world in Christ’s name—is pure joy.

Possibilities for Further Research

This brief and focused treatise explored thaumatic insights into theological anthropology, with the hopes of animating the transforming potential of theology and of transforming the Church and the world it is called to serve. Thus, there are some questions that were ignored, and paths not taken. Here I name some possible avenues for further research in this field that I am calling theological thaumatics.

I named my goals “sketches” that suggest a theo-thaumatic anthropology. I did not develop a full theological anthropology of wonder. Developing such an anthropology could be a sequel to the present study. In chapter three, I mentioned a connection between sanctification and wonder, a topic that could be expanded significantly. Related to this, one of the marks of sanctification is growth in gratitude. Since wonder is grounded in generosity, a deeper exploration into gratitude and wonder is promising. If existence is ground in gift or more specifically, in givingness, then gratitude as an “openness” to that gift could generate new insight toward a “eucharistic ontology.”⁷

If sanctification is a possible path for further study, then so is hamartiology. In discussing liberation, I brought up the notion of “making-myself” and “taking-by-force” as the antithesis to life as excessive givingness. This can serve as a framework for an exploration into both holiness and sin. Throughout this study, I occasionally mentioned dread as the “other side of the coin” of wonder. An exploration of dread and sin might yield insight as well.

⁷ John Zizioulas would be a good interlocutor here. Cf. his *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*.

An exploration of generosity, quite apart from wonder, could fill entire volumes. At the core of the Gospel is a God who gives. While wonder might not be able to “bear the weight of the whole” (as Min asserts), generosity can. Even in discussing God as Gift-Given-Giving (a concept I borrow from Stephen Webb in the excursus and chapter three) vis-à-vis wonder, I am aware that the present work is just a “first pass.” Other scholars might choose to build on or correct my conclusions here. I welcome both responses.

The notion of sacramentality plays a role in the final chapter. I only provided initial insights into a theo-thaumatic sacramentality, of Christian praxis generally and of liturgy and liberation specifically. I also began a deeper thaumatic analysis of the sacraments of the World, Baptism and Eucharist. There is more that might be investigated. For example, I do not explore preaching, which is a vital part of the liturgy in the wider Protestant tradition. Fellow Protestants may have a resource in this theo-thaumatic approach to the “right preaching the word” and the “right administration of the sacraments.” Catholic theologians might wish to do the same with the seven sacraments.

Lastly, the sacramentality of the world could be the “entry point,” on the religious and theological side of things, for deeper engagements with science. As I noted in the introduction, the belief that scientific discovery would stifle the wondrous in the human spirit, that familiarity with the world, which science makes possible, would “flatten” the world and rob it of its magic is mistaken. Science seems actually to have increased wonder. What might happen were the scientific community to take seriously the notion of the world as “sacramental”? Conversely, could the theological guild affirm science as a “sacramental axis” of wonder? This conversation potentially could be a rich one for both theologians and scientists alike.

A Homily on Wondrous Joy

The great Rabbi Heschel challenged the world to not “treat life casually,” rather to see everything as “phenomenal” and “incredible,” to live “in *radical* amazement.”⁸ The world “radical” comes from the Latin *radix* for “root.” The rabbi’s call is for humanity to rediscover wonder as its existential basis. To live fully into this generous life, humanity is to be radically available to be opened by the world. It is to be available to being grasped by a world that, *as God’s creation*, is “never spent... | Because the Holy Ghost over the bent | World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”⁹ As the “theater” of the Spirit,¹⁰ all creation is “infinite in a finite way.”¹¹

Creation—that is, the participation of contingent life in “boundless life”¹²—is an infinitely free, desirous act of divine generosity. God, in Her infinite desire, mercy, and goodness, offers life outside of Herself. The act of creation is a dynamic of ongoing givingness, which means that “the generous sap of God”¹³ penetrates the whole of created existence. That is, desire, mercy, and goodness saturate all of life.

There is the world that God creates, and then there is the “world” that humanity made for itself. This human-made sphere, unfortunately, is not marked by a rooted (*radix*) trust in the transcendental Excess that grounds existence, but by the sin of “making-myself” and “taking-by-force.” To use Pauline language, this sphere “of the flesh” bears “death” within the cosmic theater of the Spirit, whose perennially offers humanity “life and peace.”¹⁴

⁸ In Millis, *Conversation, the Sacred Art*, 135.

⁹ Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” 27.

¹⁰ Cf. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 196 ff.

¹¹ Te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 141.

¹² Boethius, “The Consolidation of Philosophy,” V.6.

¹³ Boff, *Sacraments of Life*, 4.

¹⁴ Romans 7:5; 8:5–6.

In this human-made reality, humanity is alienated from itself, the world, and the One who sustains creaturely existence. Instead of being opened by the gift of life and living in response to such excessive generosity, there is an uprooting of human life, deforming human life from a pinnacle of creative, excessive grace to a producer of profit. The “ritual” of production and profit an underlying *atheology* that informed this alienating praxis. The human as a result of the uprooting praxis becomes “a stranger in the world that he himself has made.”¹⁵

Yet, the experience of wonder is a “cypher of transcendence”¹⁶ that clues humanity as to the origin and ultimate end of this thing called “life.” The experience of wonder interrupts business as usual. It reminds humanity that creation cannot be reduce to “raw material” for human-made products. That a creation grounded in a transcendental Excess ultimately resists any attempt at total dissolution of its excess-within. Wonder is subtle yet persistent resistance.

And as resistance, wonder is subtle yet persistent repentance, for each to return humanity to itself, to make the woefully estranged, wonderfully marvelous again. Wonder reveals the transcendences of the material here, the excessive quality of the everyday. Wonder cannot be contained or manipulated by human hands and thus cannot be commodified for a profit. Instead, one is left with awe, with the reality that even human production is grounded in the divine excesses that emanates creation into being. The theological term for this excessive quality in things is sacrament. Wonder precedes and exceeds because humanity is “from the start” open[ed] [by] a sacramental world¹⁷ that reveals the transcendental Excess that sustain its being.

Christian praxis is the faithful response to Generosity Itself and thus is, in essence, a praxis of generosity. One acclimates to living in response to divine generosity via the

¹⁵ Jaeggi, *Alienation*, 3

¹⁶ Masterson *Sense of Creation*, i, 2.

¹⁷ I am paraphrasing Merleau-Ponty here. (Cf. *Phenomenology of Perception*, 483)

sacramental axes of liturgy and liberation. They are truly “revolutionary” (Latin: *revolvere*, ‘to turn,’ ‘to roll back’). Liturgy and liberation turn humanity back to excessive, generous grounding in the Giver of life. These sacramental praxes of tap into the deep basis of existence, which is Generosity Itself.

In this sense, a turn back to generosity is what softens humanity to be radically available to joyous wonder. The Christian praxis of generosity is *thaumatic* so far as it is *charismatic*. It is because of the ontological link between generosity and wonder that Christian praxis is marked by a radical predisposition to the joy of wonder. The Greek for joy (*χαρά*, *chara*) shares the root *char-*, with *charis* (‘grace’, ‘gift’). The proper human response to Generosity itself is joy.

After all, the Holy Spirit, whose name is also “Gift,”¹⁸ is none other than the Spirit of joy.¹⁹ Spirit-gifted praxis is the joyous praxis of love. The “attitude” of Christian praxis is liturgical and liberative insofar as it is one of faith, hope, and love—and joy! As liturgical and liberative, Christian praxis is not simply a posture of opened-to but principally of opened-by. That it is a praxis of “opened-by” makes one radically available to the joy of wonder.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, liturgy opens one to God in Christ so that one may be opened by the world in its struggle for justice. This opening of the Spirit—to God in Christ and to the world in Christ’s name—is pure joy. It is pure wonder. Overtaking by this joy, grasped by this wonder, one can only sing:

In Your Bread there is hidden the Spirit who is not consumed,
in your Wine there dwells the Fire that is not drunk:
the Spirit is in Your Bread, the Fire in Your Wine—
a manifest wonder, that our lips have received.²⁰

¹⁸ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.38.1–2.

¹⁹ Romans 14:17, 15:13; Galatians 5:22; 1 Thessalonians 1:6.

²⁰ Ephrem the Syrian, “Hymn of Faith, No. 10,” 144.

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